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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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PROTEST SITE OR WAR ZONE?

Security personnel deployed due to farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' march, at Singhu border, in New Delhi, on Wednesday; Farmers look for cover after police fire tear gas at them near Punjab-Haryana Shambhu border, in Patiala; A senior citizen farmer takes part in the protest; A farmer gets his eyes treated after being injured due to tear gas ***PHOTO: PTI/ANI***

Death by design: 1 farmer dead, 1 self immolates

Police use drones to drop tear gas & rubber shells; 12 cops hurt; Ryots to resume 'Delhi Chalo' march after 2 days

CHANDIGARH, 21 FEB

Farmers leaders on Wednesday put the 'Delhi Chalo' march on hold for two days after a protester was killed and about 12 police personnel injured in clashes at Khanauri, one of the two protest sites on the Punjab-Haryana border.

The deceased had an injury to his head from the tear gas shells.

Meanwhile, in Muzaffarnagar, a farmer tried to kill himself by setting himself on fire.

The fire was doused in time by the fellow agitators and he was rushed to a local hospital.

Additionally, a Sub-Inspector in Haryana, who was posted at the Tohana border died after his health deteriorated while on duty.

Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said that they will decide the next course of action on Friday evening.

Punjab farmers at Khanauri and Shambhu had resumed their agitation early in the morning after a two-day lull following the fourth round of talks on Sunday with a panel of three Union ministers in an attempt to break the deadlock.

Police fired tear gas shells at the two border points multiple times to disperse groups of protesters when they attempted to move towards the layers of barricades stalling their march to the national capital.

Earlier in the day, Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda, who is among the Union ministers engaging with the farmer leaders, called for further talks and appealed to the protesters to maintain peace.

Thousands of farmers remain camped at Khanauri and Shambhu with their tractor-trolleys and trucks agitating for their demands, including a legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP) for crops and farm debt waiver.

The dead farmer is Subhkaran Singh, 21, a resident of Baloke village in Punjab's Bathinda.

The farmers claimed that Haryana Police personnel fired rubber bullets, besides tear gas shells.

Heavy earthmoving equipment, including excavators, and modified tractors were seen at the protest sites, and police had cautioned that these might be used to break barricades and cause harm to security personnel.

Haryana Police asked owners of excavators to withdraw their machines from the protest site or else they will be held liable for action. Many protesting farmers were seen wearing masks and glasses to protect themselves from tear gas. Drones were used by police to keep an eye on the activities of the farmers on the other side of the barricades and drop tear gas shells.

A tear gas explodes after being fired upon the protesting farmers during their 'Delhi Chalo' march, near the Punjab-Haryana Shambhu Border, in Patiala, on Wednesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha are spearheading the protest. Several farmer organisations condoled the death of the farmer. The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) has held the government responsible for the situation and called a meeting on Thursday.

"The SKM strongly protests the brutal police repression and murder of farmer Subhkaran Singh of Baloke village, Bhatinda district, in police firing in the Haryana-Punjab border," it said in a statement. *—PTI/ANI*

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Allow us to peacefully march: Farmers to PM

New Delhi, 21 Feb

Framer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher, on Wednesday, urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Centre to discuss their issues or allow farmers to proceed to Delhi to hold a protest peacefully. "We are saying that it is also the Prime Minister's responsibility, we too have voted to make him the PM of the country. This country belongs to everyone. He should come forward and handle the situation and fulfil our demands," he said.

PPP, PML-N strike power-sharing deal in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, 21 FEB

In a breakthrough that could end the political uncertainty in Pakistan, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) have agreed on a power-sharing deal to form a new coalition government after intense negotiations following a fractured poll verdict. In a joint news conference late Tuesday night at Zardari House here, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari announced that PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif, 72, will assume the role of the Prime Minister once again. Similarly, PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari, 68, will be the joint candidate for the President's office.*—PTI

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Of 80 seats, SP offers just 17 to Cong in UP

LUCKNOW, 21 FEB

INDIA bloc partners Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress on Wednesday announced a tie-up for the Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, with UP's main Opposition party leaving 17 out of the 80 seats in the state for the ally. In Madhya Pradesh, SP will contest on a single seat, Khajuraho, and support the Congress in the remaining constituencies in the state. Among the 17 seats on which Congress will contest in UP included Raebareli and Amethi, once considered pocket boroughs of the party, and Varanasi which is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's constituency.*—PTI

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K'taka passes Bill banning hookah

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

Karnataka Legislative Assembly on Wednesday passed a bill that prohibits hookah bars in the State and carries a penal provision of imprisonment of one to three years and fines of up to Rs 1 lakh for violations.

The bill also prohibits the use of tobacco products in public places and the sale of cigarettes and other tobacco products near educational institutions and to persons below the age of 21 years.

No person shall either on his own or behalf of any other person open or run any hookah bar in any place, including the eating house or pub or bar or restaurant by whatever name it is called, the bill said.

PHOTO: SALAR

Hookah bar means "an establishment or place where people gather to smoke tobacco from a communal hookah or narghile, which is provided individually," according to the text of the bill. Piloting the bill for consideration in the House, Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said the main intention is to safeguard the health of citizens, especially the youth, and to stem the tide of tobacco-related diseases.

"Youth today consider the hookah a fashion statement or fashionable. It not only affects those consuming it but also people around -- passive smokers," said Rao.

In the case of hookah, tobacco, and nicotine are used along with other substances like narcotics, and to prohibit it this amendment has been brought."

Punishment for running hookah bars has newly been introduced in the bill, adding that violators of section 4A will be imprisoned for a term between one and three years, and be fined an amount between Rs 50,000 to Rs 1 lakh.

The exceptions are in a hotel having 30 rooms or a restaurant with a seating capacity of 30 persons or more, and in airports, where, the bill says, a separate provision for a smoking area or space may be made.

—PTI

Karnataka to create separate ministry for NRI Kannadigas

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday told the legislative assembly that the State government would create a separate ministry to take care of the affairs of NRI (Non-Resident Indian) Kannadigas, as promised in Congress's 2023 assembly polls manifesto.

The NRIS were from Canada, United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia, Singapore, and Western Asian countries.

"In Kerala, there is a separate NRI Ministry at the state level, as many people from Kerala go abroad, they earn there and send money back. And also, to address several of their issues like in the case of deaths abroad -- to bring the bodies back. So, we said in our manifesto that, like in Kerala, in Karnataka too we will create a ministry (for NRIs)," Parameshwara said.

The State government will provide all necessary help to them (NRIs) by law. They have shared some issues, they will be seriously considered and fulfilled.

Parameshwara headed Congress Manifesto Committee for the 2023 assembly polls.

Speaking about the increasing trend among NRIs to return to India and contribute towards the country's development, the minister said they are willing to invest here and also provide CSR funds from their businesses.

He said that in 2008 itself Karnataka government had set up an NRI Forum to address their issues and concerns and that the current government has appointed Dr Arathi Krishna as Deputy Chairman of the forum.

—PTI

A VOICE THAT UNITED INDIA

Radio icon Ameen Sayani no more

MUMBAI, 21 FEB

Ameen Sayani, radio's most recognised voice that struck an instant chord with millions of Indians who tuned in to Binaca Geetmala every week for 42 years, has died. He was 91.

Sayani, who represented the golden age of radio, suffered a heart attack Tuesday evening and was taken to a hospital in south Mumbai but could not be saved, his son Rajil told PTI.

The last rites will be held on Thursday.

"Namaste behno aur bhaiyo, main aapka dost Ameen Sayani bol raha hoon", the familiar greeting and the instantly identifiable voice coasted on airwaves into countless homes every Wednesday on Radio Ceylon from 1952 to 1988, still evoking strong nostalgia amongst listeners.

Sayani, was born in Mumbai in a multilingual family on 21 December, 1932. He also conducted the Bournvita Quiz Contest for eight years. Besides, Sayani's

Ameen Sayani ***PHOTO: PTI***

interviews with legends such as Lata Mangeshkar and Kishore Kumar are still special.

Sayani demonstrated a creative flair since childhood and started writing for his mother's fortnightly journal Rehbar when he was just 13. His elder brother, Hamid Sayani, who was already a well-known broadcaster, introduced a young Sayani to radio programmes on the English service of All India Radio Bombay.

The beginning of this success story began with failure.

After completing his college, Sayani auditioned for a presenter's job in the Hindi service of AIR but was rejected because of a slight Gujarati accent.

In 1952, Radio Ceylon, which was founded by the British, started becoming popular for its programmes in English, Tamil and Hindi. Broadcast from Colombo, Radio Ceylon began its journey in 1949. American businessman Daniel Molina saw an opportunity there and established his company, Radio Advertising Services in Mumbai. He hired Sayani's elder brother to run Ceylon's production arm. Hamid and Molina were keen to produce a programme on Hindi film songs and the elder Sayani zeroed in on his young brother who grabbed the chance for a salary of Rs 25 per week. The rest, as they say, is history. Sayani became a radio presenter in Hindi with Binaca Geetmala, a programme of Hindi film songs sponsored by the toothpaste brand, in December 1952 and never looked back.

—PTI

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JUDICIARY'S 'BHISHMA PITAMAH'

Legal doyen Fali S Nariman dead

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Fali S Nariman a doyen of Indian judiciary, who was part of several landmark legal proceedings that helped shape modern India, including the Kesavanand Bharati case in which Supreme Court laid down the basic structure doctrine, passed away on Wednesday.

Nariman is survived by his son and former Supreme Court judge Rohinton Nariman, daughter Anaheeta, and daughter-in-law Sanaya. His wife Bapsi Nariman died in 2020.

He was born into a well-to-do Parsi family on 10 January, 1929 in Rangoon, now Yangon, in Myanmar. His family fled to India during the Japanese invasion when he was only 12.

Nariman enrolled as an advocate of Bombay High Court in November 1950 and was designated a senior advocate in 1961.

He practised law for more than 70 years, initially at Bombay High Court, and since 1972, in Supreme

Fali S Nariman ***PHOTO: PTI***

Court.

Nariman was appointed as the additional solicitor general of India in May 1972. He resigned from the post a day after the imposition of Emergency on 26 June 1975. In his long and illustrious career, Nariman argued in several landmark cases, including Bhopal gas tragedy case, TMA Pai case (rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions), J Jayalalithaa's disproportionate assets case, and the case involving National Judicial Appointments Commission, which was struck down by Supreme Court.

Nariman, who was often referred to as "Bhishma Pitamah" of Indian judiciary, authored books including "Before the Memory Fades", "The State of the Nation", "India's Legal System: Can it be Saved?" and "God Save the Hon'ble Supreme Court".

He received the Padma Bhushan in 1991 and the Padma Vibhushan, the country's second highest civilian honour, in 2007.

Karnataka govt plans to name canal after Nariman

State government is planning to name a major irrigation canal after eminent jurist Nariman.

Speaking on the condolence motion moved by Speaker UT Khader in the Legislative Assembly, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister KH Patil said that Nariman's services to the State would be remembered by naming the major canal after him. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2 & 4

Manipal student jumps to death from college building

UDUPI, 21 FEB

A second-year BSC student from Manipal University took his own life by jumping from the top of a six-story building on the college campus, police said.A video that captured the 20-year-old, identified as Satyam Suman, looking down from the top of the building for some time before jumping has gone viral on social media platforms.The student, who hailed from Bihar, took this drastic step apparently because he was afraid of ongoing exams.The incident caused distress among fellow students who were present and witnessed the tragic event.Manipal police station has registered a case related to this incident last Saturday. *—ANI*

St. Gerosa: Education Department begins probe

MANGALURU, 21 FEB

Education department of Karnataka has begun inquiry into the controversial incidents at St Gerosa School, where a teacher was removed from her post for her alleged anti-Hindu remarks. Additional Commissioner of Education department in Kalaburagi, Akash Shankar IAS, who arrived in Mangaluru on Monday, collected preliminary information about the incident from officials concerned. The case relates to the teacher at the school who allegedly made some anti-Hindu comments while taking a class on Rabindranath Tagore's poem "Work is Worship."Preliminary information has been collected from officials, including DDPI and BEO, at the office of the DDPI, Shankar said.He said a detailed report will be submitted to the State government after the enquiry. Hindutva outfits had protested forcing the school management to dismiss the teacher.*—PTI*

Chikkamagaluru gets new Kendriya Vidyalaya

CHIKKAMAGALURU, 21 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has virtually inaugurated a new building of Kendriya Vidyalaya at Kadrimidri near Chikkamagaluru city along with other central schools across the nation.Udupi-Chikkamagaluru MP Shobha Karandlaje unveiled the inaugural plaque and highlighted the prolonged demand for a Kendriya Vidyalaya in the region. She recounted the government's decision in 2014, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to enhance access to quality education by expanding the network of Navodaya and central schools, leading to the sanctioning of the central school in Chikkamagaluru. Acknowledging the pivotal role played by the district administration in providing the necessary land for the centrally-sanctioned school, Karandlaje commended the collaborative effort between the State government, district administration, and the Central government.
—Salar News

Official suspended for borrowing rice from mutt

TUMAKURU, 21 FEB

State government suspended an employee working with Backward Classes Welfare Department here on charges of dereliction of duty.The rice for hostels under the department is procured from Food and Civil Supplies Department. The suspended employee, Geetamma, failed to procure the rice for the hostels and borrowed around 80 bags of rice from Shree Siddagangaa Mutt. Vishwanath, the mutt Administrator, the department had been borrowing rice for the past few months due to a delay in the supply by the government. The administrator said they don't keep track of the borrowed rice but always ensure that rice is supplied to the hostels.
—Salar News

Congress writes to top cop over cash-for-votes in RS polls

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

Congress MLA P Ravi Kumar (Ganiga) has petitioned City Police Commissioner B Dayananda over allegations of cash-for-votes for elections to four Rajya Sabha seats from Karnataka to be held on 27 February. This comes a day after Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said he had information that former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy was making offers to Congress MLAs to buy votes for D Kupendra Reddy, a candidate backed by JD(S)-BJP.

In the two-page complaint given to Dayananda on Tuesday, Kumar urged the commissioner to file a first information report (FIR) based on the points he had raised. Kumar claimed he has proof of senior BJP and JD(S) leaders approaching three independent MLAs, associated with the Congress party, with promises of inducements to cross-vote. "Once an inquiry is initiated, I will submit all evidence, which ranges from inducements to threatening them with dire consequences," he said.

In the elections for four Rajya Sabha seats, the Congress based on its numerical strength in the Assembly (135 party MLAs and three Independents) has fielded three candidates. BJP with 66 MLAs, one Independent and 19 members of JD(S) will fall short of four votes to get its second candidate, business magnate Reddy elected. Each candidate needs 45 first-preference votes to get elected.

Congress has accused JD(S) of trying to poach MLAs ***PHOTO: SALAR***

- In the two-page complaint given to Dayananda on Tuesday, Kumar urged the commissioner to file a first information report (FIR) based on the points he had raised

In the complaint, Kumar said the Independent candidates — Darshan Puttannaiah, Latha Mallikarjun and KH Puttaswamy Gowda — have been approached individually for cash-for-votes. He claimed Reddy's son and the owner of a prominent hotel had contacted Latha and offered money to cross-vote. Later, Latha's husband Mallikarjun was approached by Harihar's former MLA Shivashankar with inducements. Similar attempts have been made to Puttannaiah and Gowda.
—Salar News

Cop suspended for filing 'false case' against 40 lawyers

State government had earlier refused to suspend the officer amid protests

BEGALURU, 21 FEB

Government has suspended Aijur town Police Sub-Inspector (SI) Syed Tanveer Hussain who allegedly had filed a "false" FIR against 40 lawyers in connection with a social media post by advocate Chand Pasha against the Varanasi judge who had passed the judgement in Gyanvapi mosque case.

"Leader of the Opposition R Ashoka and senior BJP leaders have alleged that the police officer has falsely implicated lawyers by filing FIR against them," Minister for Home G Parameshwara said in the Assembly on Wednesday.

He said that the lawyers have also demanded that the police officer should be suspended and had also planned to stage a protest in Bengaluru today.

"The police officer has been suspended. The investigation will be led by Dy SP Channapatna," he said.

He said that the government will initiate stringent action against the advocate Chand Pasha who is responsible for the situation.

"It is found that he is a habitual offender and involved in such acts before," he said.

Earlier, the government had refused to suspend the police officer and Opposition BJP had warned that the government will be held responsible for disturbing law and order in the state.

Opposition leader R Ashoka, former Karnataka chief minister Basavaraj Bommai, among others, demanded that thousands of advocates were protesting, demanding suspension of the police officer.

A week-long protest had been called demanding the suspension of police officer for filing an FIR against 40 lawyers in connection with a defamatory post by an advocate and Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) worker Chand Pasha against a Varanasi judge, who gave the verdict in the Gyanvapi mosque case.

A week-long protest had been called demanding the suspension of police officer for filing FIR ***PHOTO: SALAR***

- The incident had taken a communal turn and the police had registered an FIR against the lawyers on charges of assaulting a group of people questioning action against advocate Chand Pasha for the derogatory post

The incident had taken a communal turn and the police had registered an FIR against the lawyers on charges of assaulting a group of people questioning action against advocate Chand Pasha for the derogatory post.

Police said that the advocate Chand Pasha referred to the judge as an RSS "bootlicker" who delivered the verdict one day before his retirement and addressed him with a "foul expletive".After a case was filed against the advocate, the advocate had removed the post. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar blamed former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy and BJP for the tense situation in Ramanagara district. He rejected accusations that he and his brother, Congress MP DK Suresh stoked unrest in the region. "We began our work from the very next day of the previous elections" and are committed to maintaining law and order, Shivakumar said.

Shivakumar defended the suspension of Hussain, saying, "The legislators and I instructed officers to take action as per the law."

He accused BJP and JD(S) leaders of "doing politics over the matter" and exploiting the situation for their gain. "They constantly strive to create unrest by exploiting emotional and religious sentiments. BJP harbours prejudice against minorities and its leaders even openly declared on the floor of the House their disapproval of a minority community officer," Shivakumar said.
—Salar News with Agencies

CM SLAMS MODI

Newly-elected Teachers' constituency MLA from Congress, Puttannaiah, with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Wednesday ***PHOTO: SALAR***

CM: Modi has no respect for federal system

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

Constitution has designed a federal system for the country but Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not respect it, said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday. A country is secure only if the States are secure and the Centre should not weaken the States, Siddaramaiah said at the Legislative Council on Wednesday.

Siddaramaiah said Karnataka has been suffering injustice from the Centre over the past decade and tax share to the State from the Centre has been on the decline.

As the budget size of the Centre increases, the share to the State should also increase accordingly. However, even as the budget size of the Centre is increasing, the share of taxes and grants due to the Kannadigas is decreasing, he said.

When the size of the budget was Rs 24,44,213 crore in 2018-19, we got Rs 51,000 crore. "In 2020-21, the Union Budget size was Rs 30,42,243 crore and we received Rs 31,734 crore. The Centre's budget for 2021-22 was Rs 34,83,236 crore and the State got Rs 48,589 crore. The Centre's budget for 2022-23 was Rs 41,81,232 crore and the State received only Rs 53,510 crore. In 2023-24, the Centre's budget size is Rs 45,03,007 crore while only Rs 50,257 crore was received by the State," he said.

"It is our duty to protect the Kannadigas. If the State is strong, the Centre will be strong," he said. Siddaramaiah said they are not letting us even question the injustice. "If we question the injustice being done to the State, Prime Minister Modi says we talk about dividing the country," he said.

The slogan 'My tax my share' was raised in the Council by the Congress MLCs while BJP MLCs walked out of the session.
—Salar News

MNCs to display number of Kannadiga employees

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

Minister for Backward Class Development and Kannada and Culture, Shivaraj S Tangadagi, said on Wednesday that the multinational companies in the state should display the number of Kannadigas employed on notice boards at their respective campuses."Failure to comply with the language requirement may result in the cancellation of licenses, as stated by the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government," he said.The recent amendment to the Kannada Language Comprehensive Development Act 2022 applies to a wide range of establishments, including commercial, industrial, and business undertakings, trusts, counselling centres, hospitals, laboratories, amusement centres, and hotels.
—ANI

ISRO successfully tests engine for launching Indians into space

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

ISRO has accomplished a major milestone in the human rating of its CE20 cryogenic engine that powers the cryogenic stage of the human-rated LVM3 launch vehicle for Gaganyaan human spaceflight missions, with the completion of the final round of ground qualification tests.

Rigorous testing demonstrates the engine's mettle, it said, adding the CE20 engine identified for the first uncrewed flight LVM3 G1 also went through acceptance tests.

The 13 February final test was the seventh of a series of vacuum ignition tests carried out at the High Altitude Test Facility at ISRO Propulsion Complex, Mahendragiri, to simulate flight conditions, it said. Ground qualification tests for the human rating of the CE20 engine involved life demonstration tests and endurance tests under nominal operating conditions as well as off-nominal conditions with respect to thrust, mixture ratio. iAll the ground qualification tests of the CE20 engine for the Gaganyaan programme have been successfully completed, ISRO said.

ISRO also successfully completed the acceptance tests of the flight engine identified for the first unmanned Gaganyaan mission tentatively scheduled for second quarter of 2024. This engine will power the upper stage of the human-rated LVM3 vehicle and has a thrust capability of 19 to 22 tonnes with a specific impulse of 442.5 seconds.
—PTI

Tributes pour in for Nariman in City

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

Fali S Nariman, a distinguished jurist and senior advocate in the Supreme Court of India, passed away on Wednesday. He was 95.

He was a highly respected figure in the Indian legal system, known for his sharp intellect, deep knowledge of the law, and unwavering commitment to justice. Nariman's contribution to the Cauvery water dispute is complex and multifaceted.

Many prominent figures from the State of Karnataka mourned his death and poured in their condolences over the X, previously Twitter.

NV Ramana, former Chief Justice India (CJI), expressed his condolences. "Shri Nariman witnessed our nation's many trials and tribulations, both before and after independence and fought for upholding Constitutional values till his last breath. Series of his spirited interviews at such an advanced age in the very recent past stand testimony to his commitment for the Constitutional principles." he tweeted.

HD Deve Gowda, former prime minister, requested a condolence resolution in the Karnataka Assembly & Council from both Houses for the deceased jurist. "His decades of service to Karnataka to safeguard its share of Cauvery water is unparalleled. We are indebted to him," he said.

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said, "If the farmers of Karnataka got justice in the water sharing disputes of Krishna and Kaveri rivers, Nariman's great contribution is there. Karnataka was lucky to have someone like Nariman as a lawyer,"
— Salar News

2-day job fair in City to begin from 26 Feb

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

In a big push to help unemployed youth find jobs, government on Wednesday said it will hold a mega two-day job fair 'Yuva Samruddhi Sammelana' from 26 February here, in which over 500 firms will take part and 31,000 job seekers have registered so far.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar will inaugurate the job fair at Palace Grounds. The job fair will help youths who have a completed degree, or engineering diploma and other job-oriented courses get job opportunities.

Addressing a joint press conference at Vidhana Soudha, Minister for Skill Development and Medical Education Sharan Prakash Patil and Minister for IT-BT, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Priyank Kharge said that the job fair is being organised by the Skill Development Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Department with the participation of the private sector.
—PTI

Challenging budget because of guarantee schemes: Bommai

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

This year's State budget was a failure due to improper implementation of guarantee schemes and other irresponsible financial decisions, said former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai on Wednesday.Bommai said, "They are giving Rs 2,000 to the women head of the family and raising the price of alcohol. The husbands of these women will snatch the money from them and pay it back to the government." Congress MLAs questioned Bommai, asking if he thinks all the men of the State are drunkards.
—PTI

FOR LOK SABHA POLLS

Mysore Paints to supply 26L vials of indelible ink

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Mysore Paints and Varnish Ltd has been tasked with providing over 26 lakh vials of indelible ink, which leaves a deep purple mark on a voter's left forefinger, to various states for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

State government has been manufacturing the ink since 1962, solely for the Election Commission.

The ink is applied on the left forefinger of a person as proof that she or she has cast the vote.

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

"Our total order is around 26.5 lakh vials of ink. As of date, around 60 per cent of the total material has been dispatched to the states," the managing director of Mysore Paints and Varnish Ltd, K Mohammed Irfan said.

He said around 24 states have been provided with their share of the ink.

The remaining order, he said, would be completed around 20 March.

A 10 ml vial of ink can be used to mark the fingers of around 700 people. A polling station has around 1,200 voters.

Over 12 lakh polling stations would be set up for the polls expected to be held in April-May.The ink was developed by the Council of Industrial Research-National Physical Laboratory based in Delhi.

Indelible ink mark is normally expected to last for three days when applied on the skin but lasts for a few weeks on the fingernail till the nail grows out.

COVID-19 outbreak was perhaps the only time Election Commissionhad allowed the use of the ink for non-electoral purposes.

Some states had used it to identify people under home quarantine during the pandemic.Earlier, the ink was supplied in glass vials but now plastic is used, Irfan said.

According to Election Commission, as in January India has a voter base of nearly 97 crore out of which a maximum of over 15.30 crore are in Uttar Pradesh and a minimum of 57,500 are in Lakshadweep.
—PTI

Sec 144 in Shivamogga over water dispute

SHIVAMOGGA, 21 FEB

Prohibitory orders under Section 144 of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) have been enforced until 26 February in Bhadra canals and river basin of Shivamogga district.

This comes after water from Bhadra river and its canals was illegally drawn and transported via tankers. The water released from Bhadra reservoir in Shivamogga district to Haveri and Gadag districts on 5 February for drinking water didn't reach its intended destinations, said Shivamogga Divisional Commissioner Gurudatta Hegde.

The DCs of Haveri and Gadag informed the Shivamogga DC that over 20,000 pump sets have been illegally installed along the canals to lift water. Additionally, some villagers constructed illegal check dams using sandbags, obstructing the water supply to Haveri and Gadag districts.

With scant rainfall worsening the water scarcity situation, the DC has ordered the removal of pump sets, diesel gensets and other equipment from the Bhadra canal and river basin to facilitate the unhindered flow of water to the end of the canal and ensure sufficient supply to the people.
—Salar News

Haryana passes resolution hailing Ram temple

CHANDIGARH, 21 FEB

Haryana Assembly on Wednesday unanimously passed a resolution applauding the construction of Lord Ram temple in Ayodhya. Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar moved the official resolution, which was supported by BJP ally Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) and main Opposition Congress. Khattar touched upon the struggle linked to the construction of the Ram temple and said spirit of Lord Ram prevails in every corner of the country. Home Minister Anil Vij said, "We are fortunate that in our lifetime Lord Ram temple has been constructed. Many agitations were held in the past... During one such agitation, I was arrested in Lucknow and jailed for 15 days in Unnao." BJP members also thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the successful consecration ceremony at the new Ram temple in Ayodhya. BJP MLAs raised "Jai Shri Ram" slogans in the House which were reciprocated by several Congress members. *—PTI*

Posters depicting Rahul as Lord Krishna pasted in UP

KANPUR, 21 FEB

Posters depicting Congress leader Rahul Gandhi as Lord Krishna were pasted at some places in this Uttar Pradesh district on Wednesday, the day Congress leader is expected to arrive with his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. In the posters, Gandhi is shown as Lord Krishna riding on a chariot while Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Rai is depicted as Arjun. The posters were put up by Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee (UPCC) member Sandeep Shukla. Shukla, whose photograph is also displayed at the bottom of the posters, could not be reached for comment. Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, headed by Gandhi, is scheduled to reach Kanpur via Unnao on Wednesday. Gandhi will address a public meeting in Kanpur. The yatra started from the northeastern state of Manipur on 14 January. *—PTI*

SC junks Bengal govt's lawsuit that slams CBI probe

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to pass an order on an urgent listing of a lawsuit filed by West Bengal government that has accused CBI of going ahead with its probe in post-poll violence cases, without securing the prerequisite nod from the state under the law. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing in the matter on behalf of West Bengal government, told a bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra that the matter has been adjourned nine times. West Bengal government has filed an original suit in the apex court against the Centre under Article 131 of the Constitution. On 16 November 2018, West Bengal government withdrew the "general consent" accorded to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to conduct probes and raids in the state. *—PTI*

Robbery attempt on BJP leader's son in Lucknow

LUCKNOW, 21 FEB

Police are probing a complaint that some people attempted to rob the son of a BJP Rajya Sabha candidate while he was returning home in his car from a wedding. In a complaint lodged by the driver of Sanjay Seth's son Kunal Seth, he alleged that on Tuesday night some people tried to overtake Kunal's car and also attempted to rob him and his wife. However, police have termed the allegations to be untrue. "The vehicle was traced and its driver was interrogated thoroughly. It has come to light that there was a dispute regarding road rage. Robbery has not been confirmed and is completely untrue," police said in a statement. Further investigating is underway, they added *—PTI*

SP, Congress announce tie-up in UP, MP LS polls

Congress gets 17 seats in UP, SP gets one in MP

LUCKNOW, 21 FEB

INDIA bloc partners Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress on Wednesday announced a tie-up for the Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, with UP's main Opposition party leaving 17 out of the 80 seats in the state for the ally.

In Madhya Pradesh, SP will contest on a single seat, Khajuraho, and support the Congress in the remaining constituencies in the state. Among the 17 seats on which Congress will contest in UP included Raebareli and Amethi, once considered pocket boroughs of the party, and Varanasi which is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's constituency.

The seat-sharing announcement was made at a joint press conference here by SP state chief Naresh Uttam Patel, SP National General Secretary Rajendra Chaudhary, Congress State President Ajay Rai and AICC in-charge of UP Avinash Pande. Pande said the Congress will contest on 17 seats, while on the rest 63 seats in the state, the SP and other alliance partners will contest.

SP state chief Patel said party president Akhilesh Yadav will decide candidates for the 63 parliamentary seats in UP. Apart from Raebareli, Amethi and Varanasi, the other seats on which the Congress will be contesting included Kanpur City, Fatehpur Sekri, Basgaon, Saharanpur, Prayagraj, Maharajganj, Amroha, Jhansi, Bulandshahr, Ghaziabad, Mathura, Sitapur, Barabanki and Deoria, Patel said. Sonia Gandhi is presently MP of Raebareli while Rahul Gandhi lost his Amethi seat to BJP leader Smriti Irani in 2019 polls. SP will contest on Khajuraho seat in Madhya Pradesh, which has 29 Lok Sabha seats, and support the Congress on the rest of the seats, Patel said. He said senior leaders of both the parties will chalk out future programmes of the alliance. In response to a question on the list of Congress candidates, Pande said that the party leadership will release it soon after discussion. *—PTI*

UP Congress President Ajay Rai, Congress General Secretary Avinash Pande, Samajwadi Party chief spokesperson Rajendra Chaudhary with others during a press conference, in Lucknow on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

PRIYANKA'S CALL TO AKHILESH YADAV PROVES TO BE 'CLINCHER': SOURCES

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra spoke with Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav over the phone on Wednesday to break the deadlock on seat-sharing for Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh and clinch an alliance, sources said.

The sources had earlier said the alliance had been all but sealed and the only seat on which SP had to take a call was on Shrawasti which it finally decided to keep for itself.

According to an agreement reached after the telephonic conversation between Priyanka and Akhilesh Yadav, Congress has now got seats such as Sitapur and Barabanki.

Besides these seats, the Congress will also contest Amethi, Raebareli, Kanpur Nagar, Varanasi, Saharanpur, Amroha, Fatehpur Sikri, Maharajganj, Bansgaon, Bulandshahr, Ghaziabad, Mathura, Prayagraj, Deoria and Jhansi. Congress is now getting a "fair deal" in the alliance, a source said. *—PTI*

'DELHI CHALO MARCH'

A farmer stands near a roadblock with inscription reading 'No farmer, no food' during the ongoing farmers' protest over various demands in Patiala district *PHOTO: PTI*

Will ban politicians' entry in villages: Rakesh Tikait

MEERUT /BAGHPAT, 21 FEB

Bhartiya Kisan Union National Spokesperson Rakesh Tikait on Wednesday said that if the government does not allow farmers to go to Delhi, the farmers also will not let them enter their villages during elections.

Farmers in Meerut on Wednesday took out a tractor march to reach the collectorate to press for their demand for minimum support price for crops and withdrawal of criminal cases against some farmers who took part in the 2020-21 farmers' protest at Delhi borders.

Authorities set up barriers at several places to prevent farmers from reaching the collector's office, but they were removed by the agitators.

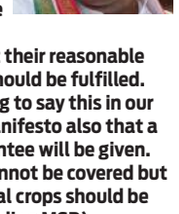
"Putting nails on the road is not justified. If they put nails on our way, we will also do the same in our villages. We also have to do barricading of our villages.

If they are not allowing us to reach Delhi, we will not let them enter our villages," Tikait told reporters when asked about obstacles, such as iron nails, being put on roads to prevent farmers from reaching Delhi.

Tikait attacked the Centre saying BJP-led government is only for industrialists.

"If it were a farmers' government, a law guaranteeing MSP would have come into force." He said that on Thursday a meeting of Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) would be held to deliberate on the future course of the farmers' agitation. BKU's district head Anurag Chaudhary said that barricades were put in three places to stop farmers, but they still reached the collectorate.

In Baghpat also, farmers took out tractor rallies and reached district headquarters at SKM's call. District BKU president Pratap Gurjar said that if their demands are not met, they will go for an indefinite sit-in and announce support to farmers of Punjab. *—PTI*



We are supporting farmers. We are saying openly that their reasonable demands should be fulfilled. We are going to say this in our election manifesto also that a legal guarantee will be given. All crops cannot be covered but the essential crops should be done (providing MSP)

-Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress National President

SANDESHKHALI VIOLENCE

NHRC notice to Bengal govt, DGP

KOLKATA, NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

The National Human Rights Commission has sent a notice to the West Bengal government and the state's police chief over reports alleging "unabated human rights violations" due to continued violence in restive Sandeshkhali, officials said on Wednesday.

Considering the gravity of the matter, the Commission has also decided to "depute its team to ascertain facts by an on-spot inquiry" into the incidents of "violence of human rights" in Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district, they said. The team will be led by a member of the NHRC who shall be assisted by officers of the rights panel, the statement said. The NHRC has taken "suo motu cognisance of print and electronic media reports that in Sandeshkhali, North 24th Paraganas, West Bengal, innocent and impoverished women have been harassed and sexually assaulted by a group of local gang of a political person, as a result of which, for last few days, local villagers have started protesting for appropriate legal action against the perpetrators of horrific crimes indulged by various goons and anti-social elements, when the local administration failed to take appropriate legal action against the perpetrators of crime," it said.

Sikhs protest near Kolkata BJP office over 'Khalistani' row

Around 200 people belonging to Sikh community staged a demonstration in front of BJP office in the city on Wednesday, expressing solidarity with an IPS officer who had alleged that West Bengal party leader Suvendu Adhikari labeled him as a 'Khalistani'. Congress chief of West Bengal, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, condemned BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari and demanded that the leader make a public apology.

The way the leaders of BJP party in Bengal have insulted a police officer, Special Superintendent, Intelligence Branch, IPS Jaspeet Singh, by calling him a Khalistani, I strongly condemn it. Perhaps these people are not aware of the culture of Bengal, the centuries-old deep relationship between Sikh community and Bengali people in Bengal. I can understand the pain that IPS Jaspeet Singh must be feeling humiliated after such a comment," Chowdhury added. *—PTI/ANI*

Sharad admits differences among INDIA allies

PUNE, 21 FEB

Rajya Sabha member Sharad Pawar on Wednesday said there are differences among some of the Opposition INDIA bloc parties in a couple of states over issues including seat-sharing which senior leaders from other states would try to resolve.

Speaking to reporters in Kolhapur, the senior politician said a meeting of INDIA alliance, formed by several Opposition parties to take on the ruling BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, has not been convened of late. A decision was taken earlier that all the parties of the opposition bloc will work together, he said.

"But majority of the parties in the alliance are limited to their states, so it was decided that all these parties will sit with other allied parties in their respective states and that process is going on," Pawar said. He noted there are differences among some the opposition alliance parties in a couple of states like Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

"In Uttar Pradesh, there is an absence of a common understanding over the seat-sharing formula. The other state is West Bengal, where there are some more problems, and the reason is that some parties such as TMC, CPI(M) and Congress are traditionally opposed to each other," he said. Such issues have not been handled so far, the NCP-Sharadchandra Pawar party chief said. *—PTI*

CONRAD PRESENTS ₹2,029 CRORE DEFICIT BUDGET

PHOTO: X

SHILLONG, 21 FEB

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Wednesday presented a Rs 2,029 crore deficit budget for the 2024-25 financial year, calling the document 'Mission 10', an action plan for making the northeastern state a $10 billion economy by 2028.

In his budget speech, Sangma, who also holds the finance portfolio, said that the total receipts stood at Rs 27,072 crore, of which revenue receipts were at Rs 23,515 and capital receipts at Rs 3,557 crore. Excluding borrowings of Rs 3,527 crore, the total receipts were estimated to be at Rs 23,545 crore, while the total expenditure was at Rs 27,072 crore, of which revenue expenditure was estimated to be at Rs 19,653 crore and capital expenditure at Rs 7,419 crore, he said.

Excluding the repayment of Rs 1,498 crore loans, the total expenditure is estimated to be at Rs 25,574 crore, the Chief Minister said. He said interest payments for the 2024-25 fiscal were estimated to be at Rs 1,236 crore and pension payments at Rs 1,865 crore.

"The budget is around 3.83 per cent of the GSDP," Sangma said. *—PTI*

MUKHYAMANTRI TIRTH YATRA

Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal during a 'Bhajan Sandhya' organised for devotees leaving for a pilgrimage to religious places under Delhi government's 'Mukhyamantri Tirth Yatra Yojana', in New Delhi, Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

CBI SUMMONS BRS'S K KAVITHA NEXT WEEK

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

CBI has summoned former Telangana chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's daughter and BRS legislator K Kavitha in connection with the Delhi excise policy scam case next week, officials said on Wednesday. They said Kavitha has been asked to appear before the investigation team at CBI headquarters here on Monday. The agency had earlier recorded her statement in 2022, they said. The Enforcement Directorate has alleged that one of the accused in the case Vijay Nair received kickbacks to the tune of at least Rs 100 crore from a group called South Group (controlled by Sarath Reddy, Kavitha and Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy) on behalf of leaders of AAP. *—PTI*

'Will ally with anyone who thinks selflessly'

CHENNAI, 21 FEB

Makkal Needhi Maiam president and actor Kamal Hassan said on Wednesday that his party will ally with 'anyone who thinks selflessly about the nation'.

He further said that the discussions are underway adding that 'good news won't come soon'.

"Good news won't come soon. When it comes, I will reveal. Discussion is still underway. As soon as the decision is taken, I won't be able to escape without telling you all. It's my duty to inform you when it's decided. I have already said that this is the time to blur party politics and think about the nation. Anyone who thinks selflessly about the nation, my MNM will be part of it. If you play local feudal politics then we won't be part of it," Hassan said.

PHOTO: PTI

He also slammed the central government for allegedly neglecting the needs of Tamil Nadu.

"It is wrong. We are punished for our service to the nation. Today we are punished without seats and voice. If the central government keeps checking from which state they are getting income, in the top three states Tamil Nadu would be there. Even Bihar people are my brothers. But my breakfast shouldn't be his snacks. Everyone should get equal opportunities. Let nation be with unity," Hassan added. He also criticised the people who are not voting during the election terming it as the defeat of democracy.

"I lost in Coimbatore South with a margin of 1728 votes. My loss is not those votes, my actual defeat is 90,000 people who didn't vote in Coimbatore South. Even in India, 40 per cent of people are not voting. You are asking whether I am a full-time politician. You are not even a full-time citizen as 40 percent are not voting. If those people vote, everything can be changed," he said. *—PTI*

'DOES BJP PAY INCOME TAX'

I-T has withdrawn ₹65 cr 'undemocratically': Cong

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Congress on Wednesday alleged that Income Tax department has "withdrawn" a sum of Rs 65 crore from its accounts in different banks "undemocratically" even when the case about their return for previous years is sub judice.

Party treasurer Ajay Maken has claimed that "democracy will be over if the action of probe agencies goes unchecked" and said Congress has full faith in the judiciary.

"Income Tax department had written to various banks to withdraw a sum of Rs 65 crore from different bank accounts of the Congress and Indian Youth Congress given the demand raised by the Income Tax authorities earlier, despite the appellate authorities hearing the case," Maken said.

He said even when Income Tax Appellate Tribunal, which Congress had moved against Income Tax department's claim of Rs 210 crore as recovery for "discrepancies" in previous tax returns has been stayed and a lien has been marked, the tax authorities have resorted to "undemocratic action" by taking out the amount from their accounts.

Congress' main bank accounts were frozen on Friday over an Income Tax demand of Rs 210 crore but an I-T appellate tribunal later allowed it to operate them pending a further hearing next week, a huge relief for the party which said the move had impacted all political activity.

Congress Party treasurer Ajay Maken *PHOTO: PTI*

Maken, who had earlier addressed a press conference to announce that Income Tax authorities had frozen its accounts, said the tribunal has put a lien of Rs 115 crore on its accounts and the party has been allowed to spend over and above that.

Party leader Vivek Tankha, who appeared before the tribunal against the order, said he told the tribunal that Congress would not be able to participate in the "festival of elections" if its accounts remain frozen.

Several party leaders, including party president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi, expressed their outrage and alleged that the government's move was an attack on democracy. Maken said democracy was in danger in the country and detailed the tribunal's order. *—PTI*

Modi to visit Gujarat, UP on 22-23 February

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh on Thursday and Friday during which he will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple development projects worth more than Rs 61,000 crore in the two states. While Modi will inaugurate, lay the foundation stone and initiate work commencement of multiple development projects worth more than Rs 48,000 crore in Gujarat, he will also launch and inaugurate projects worth over Rs 13,000 crore for transforming Varanasi and its adjoining areas, according to a statement.—*PTI*

54 detonators found at Mumbai rly station

THANE, 21 FEB

More than 50 detonators in two boxes were found abandoned on a platform at Kalyan railway station in Thane district on Wednesday, a Government Railway Police (GRP) official said.The official said the boxes were spotted by the GRP lying unattended on the platform No. 1 of the usually crowded station on the Central Railway (CR) route following which a dog squad and Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad (BDDS) personnel were immediately called to the spot.—*PTI*

PM condoles deaths of 9 killed In Bihar road accident

LAKHISARAI, 21 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday condoled the death of nine persons in a road accident in Bihar's Lakhisarai district.At least nine people, who were returning from a wedding ceremony, were killed and five others injured after a truck and a tempo collided head-on at Biharaura village along Lakhisarai-Sikandra main road in the early hours, police said. Lakshisarai SP Pankaj Kumar said, "The accident took place around 3am on the Lakhisarai-Sikandra main road. While nine people died on the spot, several others sustained injuries. All injured were taken to the nearest government hospital —*PTI*

Borders won't solve human-animal issues: HC

Court listed the matter for further consideration on 27 Feb

KOCHI, 21 FEB

Human-drawn territorial boundaries do not help resolve man-animal conflicts and can be contained only by concerted efforts, Kerala high court has said.

High Court suggested that a joint action plan be prepared by Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, "preferably at the level of the Additional Chief Secretaries", to deal with the issue of wild animal incursions in Wayanad district of Kerala.

A special bench of Justices AK JayasankaranNambiar and Gopinath P was of the view that it would be appropriate for the state governments to organise joint discussions at the level of the Additional Chief Secretaries "so that urgent decisions, if required to be taken, can be taken without getting approval from higher authorities".

Court said that a joint action plan be prepared by the states to deal with the issue of wild animal incursions **PHOTO: PTI**

"We are hopeful that such joint committees will be set up towards the above end," the court said.

It also directed the Chief Conservator of Forests, Wildlife, North Circle, Wayanad, to prepare a map of trenches, barriers and fences which have been put up by private individuals and the government in the areas within the jurisdiction of the North and South Wildlife divisions of the high-range district. The bench, in its order

- The court's intervention comes when Wayanad has been witnessing a rise in animal attacks and incursions in human settlements and has led to loss of several lives in the recent months

dated 19 February, directed that the map be prepared within 10 days and submitted before a committee constituted by the court in March last year to deal with man-animal conflicts.

"He (Chief Conservator of Forests, Wildlife, North Circle, Wayanad) shall also file an affidavit regarding the availability of the details of water tanks, other watering holes artificially created and the steps taken to ensure the availability of water during the summer months so as to prevent wildlife intrusions into human settlements on account of shortage of water within the forest areas," the bench said in its order.

With the directions the court listed the matter for further consideration on 27 February.

The order was issued pursuant to the court holding a discussion with the District Collector, Wayanad, the Superintendent of Police, the Additional Director General of Police, the Additional Chief Secretary, the Chief Conservator of Forests, the Chief Wildlife Warden and the Divisional Forest Officer through video conference. The high court's intervention comes at a time when the high-range district is witnessing a rise in animal attacks and incursions in human settlements and has led to loss of several lives in the recent months. —*PTI*

Youth Cong march turns violent, police resorts to lathicharge

WAYANAD, 21 FEB

A protest march taken out by the activists of Youth Congress here alleging failure of the state government in addressing human-animal conflict turned violent on Wednesday.

Police had to resort to lathi charge and water cannons to disperse the angry agitators who allegedly tried to jump barricades placed near the district collectorate.

The Youth Congress (YC) carried out the protest march a day after the Congress-led UDF boycotted an all-party meeting convened by a ministerial delegation here demanding the resignation of Forest Minister AK Saseendran.Though the protest march began on a peaceful note, it turned violent after the YC workers tried to jump the police barricade.

Police resorted to water cannons to disperse the protesters who allegedly pelted stones at the cops later.In a subsequent lathi charge, some YC activists and police personnel suffered injuries.The agitators also squatted on the road and staged a sit-in protest later raising slogans against the state government.Congress leader and Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi and Governor Arif Mohammed Khan had visited the family members of those who were killed in animal attacks. —*PTI*

UNION MIN MEETS WITH FAMILIES OF VICTIMS

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bhupendra Yadav on Wednesday met with the families of victims of recent attacks by wild elephants in Kerala's Wayanad district.Earlier this week, Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi abruptly halted his 'Bharat Jodo NyayYatra' in Varanasi, and left for his constituency, prompted by public protest over the deaths of residents in wild elephant attacks. He visited the homes of the families and interacted with them. —*ANI*

Manipur sees dip in students for boards

IMPHAL, 21 FEB

Amid ethnic violence, the number of students appearing for Class 12 state board examinations in Manipur this year has dropped by around 5,000 to over 31,000, an official said on Wednesday.

Last year, more than 36,000 students appeared for the Council of Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate Exams (COHSEM) across 120 centres in the state, he said.

"The number of students and examination centres has decreased this year as compared to last year due to the prevailing law and order situation," COHSEM Chairman T Ojit Singh said.

Around 31,000 students are appearing for the council's examinations from Wednesday across 111 centres, he said.

This year's examinations were originally scheduled to be conducted at 114 centres but three schools - one each in Kakching, Imphal East and Chakpikarong - have been removed from the list as a result of the "prevailing situation in outlying areas of hills and valley districts," he said.

"Students who were supposed to appear for the exams in the three schools have been asked to report at other centres," the official said.Of the 111 centres, 75 are in six valley districts and the remaining 36 are in the hills, Singh said.

Internet suspension in extended

Manipur government on Wednesday extended the suspension of internet services in Churachandpur district for five days in view of the prevailing law and order situation in the district, following violence over an action taken against a policeman.

A home department order, issued by Chief Secretary Vineet Joshi, said, "The state government after reviewing the prevailing law and order situation in Churachandpur district decided to continue suspension of internet services and services through VPN throughout the whole revenue jurisdiction of Churachandpur district."

Mobile service providers are also directed to ensure compliance with the order, it said.

The government had first imposed a temporary suspension on internet services on 16 February. —*PTI*

900 kg of Mephedrone seized in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

In a major drug haul, police have seized around 900 kg of Mephedrone -- street name "Meow Meow" -- from two locations in south Delhi, officials said on Wednesday, putting the total value of the seizure at more than Rs 2,000 crore.

The seizure was made following raids by officials of Pune and Delhi police forces on information from the Pune Police Tuesday in Kotla Mubarakpur and Hauz Khas. —*ANI*

GREEK PM IN INDIA

India, Greece to boost migration and mobility

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

The strategic partnership between India and Greece is of "particular" importance and further expansion of their overall ties with a focus on economic engagement is being explored, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on Wednesday.

Mitsotakis is on a two-day visit to India. It is the first visit to India by a head of state of Greece in 15 years. Mitsotakis was accorded a ceremonial welcome at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan ahead of his talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.In the morning, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar called on Mitsotakis.

"Delighted to call on Prime Minister @kmitsotakis of Greece today. Valued his commitment to enhancing India-Greece ties. Look forward to the strengthening of our strategic partnership,"

- Mitsotakis was accorded a ceremonial welcome at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan ahead of his talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Jaishankar posted on 'X'.

Mitsotakis began his India visit by paying homage to Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat.India-Greece relations were elevated to a 'strategic partnership' during Modi's visit to Greece in August last year.

Mitsotakis will be the chief guest and keynote speaker at Raisina Dialogue in the national capital on Wednesday.

"Prime Minister Mitsotakis' visit is expected to further strengthen and deepen the strategic partnership between India and Greece," the Ministry of External Affairs said last week. —*PTI*

India, China hold talks on Ladakh border row

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

India and China held a fresh round of high-level military talks to resolve the over three-and-half-year-old border row in eastern Ladakh that saw both sides agreeing to maintain "peace and tranquillity" on the ground but there was no indication of any breakthrough.

The 21st round of India-China corps commander level meeting was held at Chushul-Moldo border meeting point on February 19, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Wednesday.

The Indian side strongly pressed for resolution of the lingering issues at Depsang and Demchok, people familiar with the matter said, adding there was no tangible forward movement in the talks.

The MEA said the two sides agreed to maintain communication on the way ahead through the relevant military and diplomatic mechanisms.

"The discussions built on the previous rounds, seeking complete disengagement in the remaining areas along the LAC (Line of Actual Control) in Eastern Ladakh as an essential basis for restoration of peace and tranquillity in the India-China border areas," it said in a statement.

The MEA said the two sides shared their perspectives on this in the talks held in a "friendly and cordial" atmosphere.

"The two sides have agreed to maintain communication on the way ahead through the relevant military and diplomatic mechanisms. They also committed to maintain peace and tranquillity on the ground in the border areas in the interim," it said.

The 20th round of military talks were held on 9 and 10 October.

Following that round of talks, the MEA had said that the two sides exchanged views in a frank, open and constructive manner for an early and mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues along the LAC. The eastern Ladakh border standoff erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong lake area. —*PTI*

Nariman's contribution to K'taka immeasurable

BRIJESH KALAPPA
BENGALURU, 21 FEB

The contribution of Fali Nariman to the State of Karnataka is immeasurable.

In fact, the State must declare him posthumously as a Karnataka Rathna. Beginning his service of the State in 1986, he fought a long and arduous battle to protect the State's water rights. In 1991, Karnataka had to supply 205 TMC annually to the State of Tamil Nadu- by 2007, that figure came to be reduced to just 192, by 2018 that figure had come down to 177.

The hidden benefit of an additional 25 to 30 TMC came in the form of the measuring station for the river which was earlier being measured at Mettur and this came to be shifted to Biligundlu.

In the Krishna River, it was Nariman's brilliant advocacy which helped the State increase its allocation from 734 to 911 TMC.

Additionally the State received the additional benefit of raising the dam height of the Almatti dam from 519.6 feet to 524.256 feet. In the Mahadayi river dispute, he helped the State win an allocation of 29 TMC.

What is the value of 1 TMC of water?

The State of Karnataka on occasion buys water from Maharashtra, When last heard, the price paid for 1 TMC was upwards of Rs 5 crore.On a conservative estimate, the team led by Nariman has earned the State an additional 1000 crore atleast on an annual basis.

While on the job, Nariman was grouchy and resembled an angry bird, but when relaxed he was a great raconteur. He was deeply interested in Politics and advances in legal issues. He appreciated a good meal and if he went out in a group, he would always discreetly disappear seconds before the bill arrived and voila, the bill would never reach the table.

He loved his wife Bapsi deeply and it is indeed a miracle that he survived for four long years after her demise. A legend is truly gone!

—*Salar News*

The author is a senior advocate in the Supreme Court

JUDICIARY'S 'BHISHMA PITAMAH'

Fali combined intellect & ethics, minced no words

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

The judiciary's moral compass who blended ethicality with intellect, constitutional jurist Fali Sam Nariman will go down in legal history for his pivotal contribution to cases that have shaped India -- the basic structure doctrine judgement in KesavanandaBharati being just one of them.

Nariman, variously termed Bhishma Pitamah, conscience keeper and the man with a giant intellect, died here on Wednesday. He was 95.

The eminent jurist and author, a recipient of the Padma Vibhushan in 2007 and the Padma Bhushan in 1991, was a renowned votary of civil liberties and secularism. He was famously outspoken, a bold voice unhesitatingly taking on the state on a range of issues and articulating his views on ills plaguing the society at large.

For Nariman, a guiding light for lawyers down the decades, it didn't matter who was in power,

Appointed additional solicitor general of India in May 1972, he resigned from the post just a day after Indira Gandhi imposed Emergency on 26 June, 1975. Rare those days, and even now, this possibly deprived him of opportunities in the latter half of the career to serve the nation as the solicitor general or attorney general for India.

That forthrightness stayed his calling card right till the end.

Nariman was a recipient of the Padma Vibhushan in 2007 and the Padma Bhushan in 1991, was a renowned votary of civil liberties and secularism **PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS**

Nariman assisted NanabhoyPalkhivala in the KesavanandaBharati case, the most significant case in independent India. The 1973 verdict laid down "basic structure doctrine" of the Constitution, clipping the Parliament's power to amend the Constitution and simultaneously giving the judiciary the authority to review any amendment on grounds of its violation.

Nariman was also a prolific author.

His "Before the Memory Fades" is a professional guide for new lawyers across the nation. He has also written "The State of the Nation", "India's Legal System: Can it be Saved?" and "God Save the Hon'ble Supreme Court". —*PTI*

Attorney General, we mourn the sad demise and passing away of Fali Nariman. He was a great giant of an intellectual.

-DY Chandrachud, CJI

A great son of India passes away. Not just one of the greatest lawyers of our country but one of the finest human beings who stood like a colossus above all.

-Kapil Sibal, Member of Rajya Sabha

End of an era—#falinariman passes away, a living legend who will forever be in hearts & minds of those in law & public life.

-Abhishekh Singhvi, Congress leader

Shri Fali Nariman Ji was among the most outstanding legal minds and intellectuals. He devoted his life to making justice accessible to common citizens.

-Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

NOTABLE CASES

- **Golaknath case of 1967:** SC said Parliament can't make a law which infringes fundamental rights. Nariman appeared for an intervenor supporting the petitioners seeking preservation of fundamental rights
- **Kesavananda Bharati case:** The judgement laid down "basic structure doctrine" of Constitution, clipping Parliament's power to amend Constitution. The 1973 verdict gave the judiciary authority to review any constitutional amendment on grounds of violation
- **TMA Pai Foundation case:** SC recognised autonomy of private educational institutions under Article 19(1)(g), and allowed them to operate without excessive governmental interferenc
- **SP Gupta or First judges case, 1981:** SC held that CJI's recommendation in judicial appointment can be turned down by the government. However, it led to creation of collegium system of appointment of judges in 1993
- **1984 Bhopal gas tragedy case:** Nariman appeared for Union Carbide, whose gas leak killed thousands. He finalised a deal between victims and the company outside court. But he later admitted it was a mistake
- **Disproportionate assets case against J Jayalalithaa:** The former Tamil Nadu CM hired Nariman in 2014 to represent her. The senior lawyer secured her bail
- **Narmada Rehabilitation case:** Nariman represented Gujarat government but quit following news reports of attacks on Christians
- **The Cauvery water dispute case:** Nariman represented Karnataka in the SC in the river water sharing dispute between Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala
- **Covid-19 case:** Nariman represented Parsis in its dispute over protocol for handling of dead bodies of Parsi Zoroastrian Covid-19 victims under which metallic nets were to be installed above 'Tower of Silence' so that birds did not feed on the corpses and carry the killer virus

The golden voice is no more

Ameen Sayani passes away... and with him a golden era

Ameen Sayani: The voice that united India

21 DEC, 1932 TO 21 FEB, 2024

- Sayani was initially an English broadcaster but later moved to Hindi post-Independence
- He holds record for hosting or providing voice-overs for over 54,000 radio programmes
- He holds Limca Book of Records for 19,000 jingles as a voice-over artist
- Binaca Geetmala was his weekly countdown show of top Hindi film songs
- It had **20 lakh** listeners
- It was initially to air on All India Radio but the Information and Broadcasting Ministry rejected it as film songs were 'vulgar art form'
- Radio Ceylon then hosted the programme, which became the first radio countdown show of Indian film songs and was the longest running too – from 1952 to 1988
- It was shifted to Vividh Bharati in 1989 where it ran till 1994

Brahmanand S Siingh

A year and half back, while I was shooting an informal documentary on Ameen Sayani, he recalled playing Macbeth while he was at school in Gwalior. He recited the following lines for us:

"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow … creeps in this petty pace from day to day ... to the last syllable of recorded time ... and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty deathOut, out, brief candle …
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more....
It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

His sound and fury was captivating.

These lines make us come to terms with death and the lightness of life.

It is upsetting that the master of vocal jugglery, full of charm, warmth and style, is no more. However, it is comforting to think of his life and the legacy he has left behind for his fans in the way of precious recordings and memories.

My first listening of Binaca Geetmala

I was seven-year-old when I first heard Binaca Geet Mala on a small transistor on a summery evening. I fell in love with the anchor -- Ameen Sayani's—voice. Little did I know that I might move to Mumbai and get to know his son Rajil, and through his son, the legend himself. Sayani was a wonderful person despite his dominance and achievements in the radio world.

They don't make people like him anymore. He was simple, gifted, hard-working, principled, determined, loving, caring, appreciative, respectful and one of the most-admired icons of all times.

On Tuesday, the most mellifluous voice of on Radio breathed its last (barely a month after he celebrated his 91st birthday on 21 December, 2023) at HN Reliance Hospital in Mumbai after being taken there, after he suffered a heart attack.

With Ameen Sayani's death, it is the end of an era of radio announcers. With Sayani gone we have also lost the romance of radio announcements, which grew upon us slowly and imperceptibly during our formative years.

A series of exciting coincidences

After that fateful radio exposure of mine on that summer evening, I became a radio junkie waiting to snort anything which had film songs and Sayani in it. And in the 70s, there was plenty of it.

For those of us who can recall and many others who can imagine …Binaca Geetmala, S Kumar ka Filmi Muqadama, Filmi Mulaqaat, Bournvita Quizz contest, Shalimar Superlac Jodi, Sitaron Ki Pasand, Chamakte Sitaare, Mehekti Baatein, Sangeet Ke Sitaaron Ki Mehfil and the countless 15-minute promotional programmes for the upcoming new releases in an era of no television, had reached cult status.

I'm not surprised at all when I came to know that Sayani's career had spanned over six decades, producing and presenting over 54,000 radio programs and 19,000 voice-overs for advertisements and jingles.

Most of it, however, is a series of exciting coincidences. First when he was, asked to do a recording for Ovaltine Phulwari and he shouted at the top of his voice with all energy and enthusiasm. And then when he was asked to retain the energy and enthusiasm but also make it conversational not shout at the top of his voice, the young Ameen, it seems, could learn things fast. Which must be the reason that from being a boy studying in a Gujarati Medium School called New Era, used to language like, by his own admission, "ayela … gayela … khali peeli bo marta hai" he went on to master the formal Hindustani to the delight of lay people and the connoisseurs alike.

Then came the recommendation of his father's friend suggesting he be sent to a public school, which is how he went to Scindia in Gwalior. And eventually, the guidance of his loving older brother, Hamid Sayani, who passed away young but not before having guided Ameen into portals of stardom.

The opening of opportunities due the Radio Ceylon association too, is supremely serendipitous.

The then I&B Minister of India, Balakrishna Vishwanath Keskar who believed Indian music had degenerated and had banned it on All India Radio and Vividh Bharti. Two international entrepreneurs took the opportunity to shift the entire Hindi film entertainment publicity to Radio Ceylon and Ameen Sayani ruled the scenario. His programs spawned dozens of announcers, all of whom wanted to speak like Ameen Sayani, much like how everyone wanted to dress and sport hair like Rajesh Khanna.

Lucky to meet him, know him

Much later, when I came to Mumbai and had an opportunity to start interacting him on and off, through his son, Rajil, who had become a friend by then, I could always sense a certain awe and fan-moment whenever I met him. That I could feature him in my film on RD Burman, Pancham Unmixed was an added honour for me.

In the 70s, Ameen Sayani dominated the radio soundscape in a manner similar to how Rajesh Khanna, Amitabh Bachchan, Kishore Kumar, Mohammad Rafi, Mukesh, Manna Dey, Lata Mangeskar, Asha Bhosle dominated the music and entertainment world. For me, he's someone I have idolized and loved so much due to his authenticity and simplicity. It's sad that by the time Rajil and I were narrowing down the possibility to create a film on him, he was past his prime both in terms of the strength of voice as well as his elephantine memory. And yet, the moment, he had the mike in front of him, the energy levels easily trebled.

I consider myself fortunate to have known him a little bit and spent some time with him. For me, he is and will always be a colossus who programmed and executed innumerable programmes in a matter of fact way which today carries the stamp of a genius.

For me, and for the world of radio listeners, his voice will always have the magic it had when I was 7-8 years old and heard it for the first time on a transistor.

Brahmanand S Siingh is a two-National Award winning and multiple award-winning filmmaker, author and speaker based out of Mumbai

'Awaaz ki duniya ka dost' goes quiet forever; RIP Sayani sir!

Kalpana Swamy

"Jee Haan, Behno Aur Bhaiyo!" These words have echoed in millions of ears for decades. The moment one hears these words, they are certain of an audio treat with some of the finest narratives followed by an array of memorable melodious songs. Today as Ameen Sayani breathed his last, these iconic words rest in eternal peace with him.

Ameen Sayani can easily be called the Godfather of the Indian voice industry. Ruling listeners' hearts from the early 1950s till the mid-1990s, he brought in a new wave in the radio and voice-over industry and paved the way for so many young aspirants to try their luck in the voice industry.

The radio announcing industry can be divided into two eras, Before Ameen and After Sayani. Before he entered into the announcing industry, the style of compering was very formal or straightforward. He brought with him a certain charm and elegance, which made every listener sit up and pay attention to what he said. In the times, when television had not yet taken over, Ameen Sayani conquered every heart through his bass-tone voice and immaculate modulation that gave the much-needed credibility and oomph to every narration. Listeners' imagination would come into play when he would describe a song or the artiste's creativity in his countdown show. The much-needed narrative to each song in every paaydaan, created a film of its own in the listener's mind. He made radio listening a very personal interactive experience. It seemed he was addressing each listener individually with his effortless ease.

Having grown up in the 80s and 90s, I was introduced to Ameen Sayani by my parents and their love for Vividh Bharti. I have grown up listening to his inimitable style and that became the ultimate benchmark for announcing, compering and interacting on public platforms for me. Announcement/anchoring was equal to Ameen Sayani to me, PERIOD!

A few years ago, when I had got an opportunity to attend a two-day music conference, little did I know that the grand finale was a surprise session with the legend himself. During that conference, I also made a presentation on the importance of audience connection, which was applauded by all in general and Ameen sir's son in particular. On the second day when the surprise was shared that the culminating session would be graced by Ameen sir, I had no words to express my feelings. Rajil Sayani (Ameen sir's son) had by now gauged my devotion for the man and gracefully asked me to sit in the front row for a better view.

My voice guru was on the stage and watching his fragile body with a support belt for his spine, I was emotional and controlling my tears. Then the man starts talking "Jee Haan Behno aur Bhaiyo!" and I burst into tears. The emotions were unexplainable. The session ended and Ameen sir had to be taken to the green room. Rajil bhai very sweetly came to me and my friend and said, "Come, let's take Papa to the green room". With eyes wide open, we went to the stage, held his hand from each side and helped him walk slowly and steadily to the green room. The moment he settled down in his chair, he gave me a sweet glance and I was crying again, this time like a baby without any control over my emotions. In a composed manner, he put his hand on my head, asked my name and said, "You have a sweet voice, don't spoil it by crying!" I was standing there speechless! How can one contain so much love and affection? This one blessing was more than enough for my lifetime.

The moment I got out of the auditorium, I called up Dad and narrated the whole scene to him and now both Dad and I were crying with happiness.

Today I curate my music shows and interact with artists from the entertainment industry, and every time I take a silent approval from my voice guru and evaluate myself by asking if Ameen Sayani ever heard my anchoring, would he approve of this style and content.

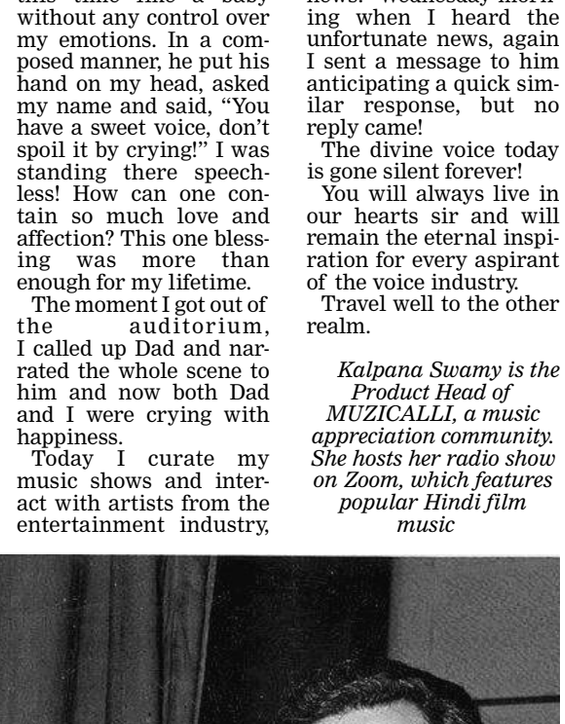
Last few years there have been multiple rumours of his demise and every time I read something, I would message Rajil bhai and he would quickly respond, "Don't worry he is fine, don't believe in fake news!" Wednesday morning when I heard the unfortunate news, again I sent a message to him anticipating a quick similar response, but no reply came!

The divine voice today is gone silent forever!

You will always live in our hearts sir and will remain the eternal inspiration for every aspirant of the voice industry.

Travel well to the other realm.

Kalpana Swamy is the Product Head of MUZICALLI, a music appreciation community. She hosts her radio show on Zoom, which features popular Hindi film music



The writer Kalpana Swamy with Ameen Sayani **PHOTO: SALAR**

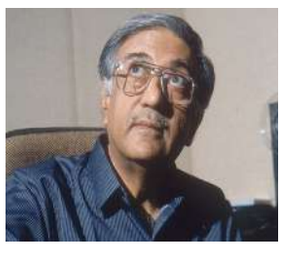
RD Burman, Asha Bhosle and Ameen Sayani **PHOTO: X/@FILMHISTORYPIC**

Noor Jehan, first female singing star of Indian cinema, with Ameen Sayani; (right) Sayani with his son Rajil Sayani and wife Rama Sayani

What made Sayani such a cult phenomenon?

To begin with, no one could say 'Namaskar Behno aur Bhaiyon, main aapka dost Ameen Sayani bol raha hoon'. The voice and the lines had a hypnotic effect on the collective psyche of the nation. Like the Pied Piper, Sayani galvanized like-minded people together and held us all in a spell.

Then of course, his authenticity. He chose to play on his strengths and never imitated anyone else. He was also very hard-working and coupled it with a sense of perfection. He had no trace of personal ego and took both success and bumps all in the same stride.



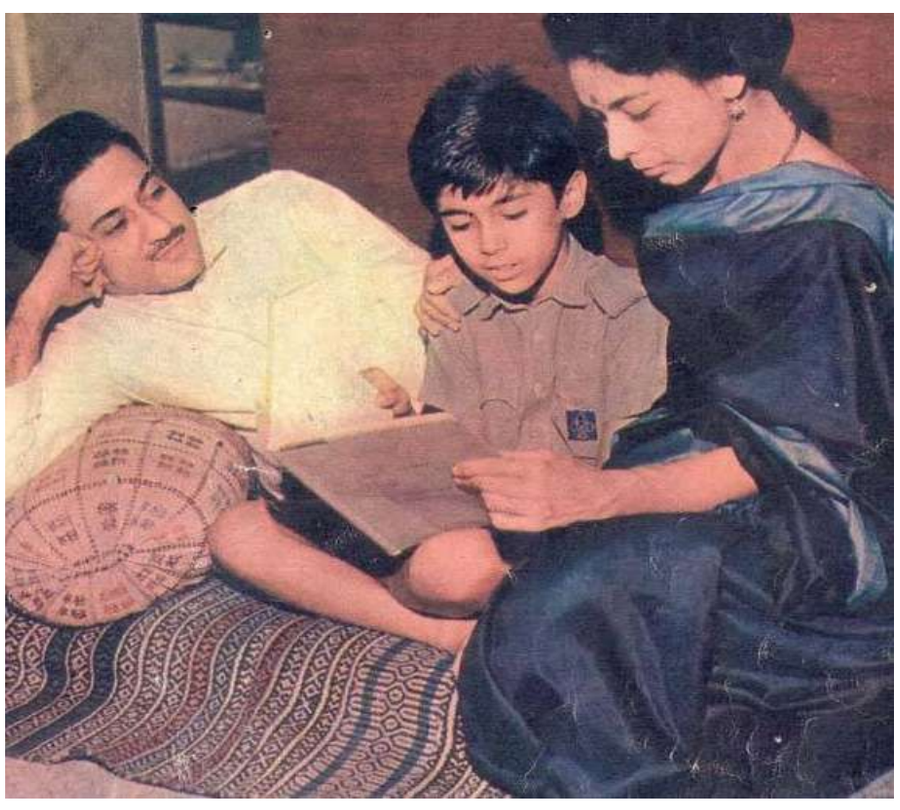


PHOTO: X/@FILMHISTORYPIC, @BUREAUCRATSIND

PPP, PML-N strike new deal in Pak

Shehbaz Sharif set to be the Prime Minister once again

ISLAMABAD, 21 FEB

In a breakthrough that could end the political uncertainty in Pakistan, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) have agreed on a power-sharing deal to form a new coalition government after intense negotiations following a fractured poll verdict.

In a joint news conference late Tuesday night at Zardari House here, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari announced that PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif, 72, will assume the role of the Prime Minister once again.

Similarly, PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari, 68, will be the joint candidate for the President's office. PPP and PML-N have achieved the required number, and (now) we are in a position to form the government," Bilawal told reporters without revealing the number of lawmakers they have in the National Assembly after 8 February elections.

To form a government, a party must win 133 out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly or the lower house of Parliament. He said former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party-backed independent candidates and Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) failed to achieve a simple majority in Parliament to form a government in the Centre.

Bilawal hoped that the news of the political alliance with PML-N to form a coalition government would lead to a positive market response as the cash-strapped country faced a hung Parliament after the elections.

Last week, PML-N in a surprise move announced that the party supremo and three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif nominated his younger brother Shehbaz as a candidate for the slot of prime minister. Nawaz, 74, was earlier confident to secure a record fourth term. However, his party failed to win enough seats to form a government on its own.

Independent candidates - a majority backed by PTI- won 93 National Assembly seats. PML-N won 75 seats while the PPP came third with 54 seats. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) has 17 seats.

Speaking at the press conference, Shehbaz asserted that his party now has the "required numbers" with the PPP to be in a position to form the next government as he thanked the leadership of the two parties for the positive conclusion to the talks. *—PTI*

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto announced that PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif, 72, will assume the role of Prime Minister ***PHOTO: PTI***

Finance Minister position remains open

ISLAMABAD, 21 FEB

Pakistan's political impasse may end with the formation of a coalition government but its economic worries may linger on primarily due to the dilemma of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party over the appointment of the finance minister of the cash-strapped country.

In January, the cash-strapped country received over USD 700 million second tranche from the Washington-based global lender under the existing USD 3 billion SBA agreed towards June last year when Pakistan was slowly drifting towards default.

Earlier this week, US-based Fitch Ratings — one of three leading global rating agencies — said in its report that a new International Monetary Fund (IMF) deal to succeed the Stand-By Arrangement (SBA), expiring in March this year, was key to Pakistan's credit profile.

Pakistan has not completed the last USD 6.5 billion IMF bailout package, and therefore, the first task of the new finance minister will be to sit with the Washington-based global lender to get the last loan tranche of USD 1.2 billion. He or she would also need to kick-start negotiations for a new long-term deal. *—PTI*

Pak elections must be investigated, says US

WASHINGTON / ISLAMABAD, 21 FEB

The US has said that allegations of "interference or fraud" in Pakistan's recent elections must be fully and transparently investigated according to the country's laws and procedures.

US state department spokesperson Matthew Miller made the remarks on Tuesday while responding to a question about rigging allegations made by former Rawalpindi Commissioner Liaqat Ali Chattha. On February 17, the senior Pakistani bureaucrat alleged that the chief election commissioner and the chief justice were involved in "poll-rigging" in the 8 February elections and resigned from his post, taking the "responsibility for all this wrongdoing".

Chattha said the candidates who were "losing" the elections "were made to win". "I am taking the responsibility for all this wrongdoing and telling you that the chief election commissioner and the chief justice are also completely involved in this," he was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper. To another question about respecting the mandate won by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party emerging as the largest group in Parliament, Miller said, "I don't want to get into an internal Pakistani matter, which I very much believe that the formation of a new government is."

—PTI

Pak stock market reacts positively

Karachi, 21 Feb

Pakistan's stock market on Wednesday reacted positively to the announcement of a deal between two major political parties-- the PML-N and the PPP--to form a coalition government after the general election resulted in a hung Parliament The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) have agreed on a power-sharing deal to form a new coalition government after intense negotiations following a fractured poll verdict in the February 8 polls. The first clear picture of the new government after the general elections led to shares at the Pakistan Stock Exchange gaining over 900 points with analysts expecting more gains by the close of day. *—PTI*

Israeli strike that hit Damascus residential area killed two: Syria

DAMASCUS, 21 FEB

Israeli strikes hit a neighbourhood of the Syrian capital on Wednesday morning, killing two people and causing material damage, Syria's state TV said.

There was no confirmation of the strikes from Israel. The Syrian state TV reported that several missiles hit the western neighbourhood of Kfar Sousseh but did not elaborate or say who were the people killed. The pro-government Sham FM radio station said the strike hit a building near an Iranian school.

Rami Abdurrahman, who heads the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based opposition war monitor, said the two killed were inside an apartment but did not give any clues about their identities. He added that the strike was similar to last month's killing in Beirut of Saleh Arouri, a top official with the militant Palestinian Hamas group.

The strike damaged the fourth floor of a 10-story building, shattered window glass on nearby buildings and also damaged dozens of cars parked in the area. An empty parked bus for the nearby Al-Bawader Private School was also damaged and people were seen rushing to the school to take their children. *—AP*

Increasing chaos halts food deliveries into N Gaza

Rafah, 21 Feb

The World Food Programme said Tuesday it has paused deliveries of food to isolated northern Gaza because of increasing chaos across the territory, hiking fears of potential starvation. A study by the UN children's agency warned that one in six children in the north are acutely malnourished. Entry of aid trucks into the besieged territory has been more than halved in the past two weeks, according to UN figures. Overwhelmed UN and relief workers said intake of trucks and distribution have been crippled by Israeli failure to ensure convoys' safety amid its bombardment and ground offensive and by a breakdown in security, with hungry Palestinians frequently overwhelming trucks to take food. The weakening of the aid operation threatens to deepen misery across the territory, where Israel's air and ground offensive, launched in response to Hamas' October 7 attack, has killed over 29,000 Palestinians, obliterated entire neighbourhoods and displaced more than 80 per cent of the population of 2.3 million. *—AP*

Pipeline blasts: Iran accuses Israel of sabotage

Dubai, 21 Feb

An Israeli sabotage attack on an Iranian natural gas pipeline caused the multiple explosions that struck it a week ago, Iran's oil minister alleged on Wednesday, further raising tensions between the regional archenemies amid Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The comments by Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji come as Israel has been blamed for a series of attacks targeting Tehran's nuclear programme. The "explosion of the gas pipeline was an Israeli plot," Owji said, according to Iran's state-run IRNA news agency. "The enemy intended to disturb gas service in the provinces and put people's gas distribution at risk." *—AP*

US veto sent wrong message over Gaza, says China

Beijing, 21 Feb

China has sharply criticised the US for vetoing a UN Security Council resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Beijing said the move sent the "wrong message" and effectively gave a "green light to the continued slaughter". The White House said the Algerian-proposed resolution would "jeopardise" talks to end the war. The US has proposed its own temporary ceasefire resolution, which also warned Israel not to invade the city of Rafah. There has been widespread condemnation of the US decision to block Algeria's resolution as fighting continued in Gaza. It was backed by 13 of the 15 members of the UN Security Council - with the UK abstaining. *—BBC News*

Palestinians mourn over relatives killed in the Israeli bombardments of the Gaza Strip at Al Aqsa Hospital in Deir al Balah on Wednesday. The strike damaged the fourth floor of a 10-story building ***PHOTO: PTI***

Trident missile test fails for second time in a row

LONDON, 21 FEB

The test firing of a Trident missile from a Royal Navy submarine has failed, for the second time in a row. The latest test of the UK's nuclear deterrent was from HMS Vanguard and was witnessed by the defence secretary. The missile's booster rockets failed and it landed in the sea close to the launch site, according to the Sun, which first reported the malfunction. When on patrol missiles would usually carry nuclear warheads but they are not fitted for test fires. The Ministry of Defence said the "nuclear deterrent remains safe, secure and effective". This is highly embarrassing for both the UK and the US manufacturer of the Trident missile. British tests of Trident missiles are rare, not least because of the costs. The price tag of each missile is around £17 million and the last test was in 2016 when it also ended in failure when the missile veered off course. *—BBC News*

Aus blogger won't appeal suspended death sentence

MELBOURNE, 21 FEB

A China-born Australian democracy blogger will not appeal his suspended death sentence imposed by a Beijing court, with his family saying Wednesday a legal challenge would be detrimental to his welfare. Yang Hengjun was found guilty of espionage following a closed trial and sentenced two weeks ago to death with a two-year reprieve. Such sentences are often commuted to life in prison after the two years. A statement from Yang's family and close friends said they strongly supported the 58-year-old's decision to waive his right to appeal. "There are two practical reasons why an appeal would be detrimental to Yang's welfare," the statement said. *—AP*

X suspends Alexi Navalny's wife account

MOSCOW, 21 FEB

Yulia Navalnaya's account on X - formerly Twitter - was briefly suspended a day after she used the platform to vow to continue her husband's campaigning. On Monday, she posted a video promising to fight for a "free Russia", days after Alexei Navalny's death in a Russian prison was confirmed.

On Tuesday afternoon her account was briefly not accessible to users. In a statement, X said it was blocked "mistakenly" due to a system "error". A post on the site's official safety account read: "Our platform's defense mechanism against manipulation and spam mistakenly flagged @yulia_navalnaya as violating our rules. "We unsuspended the account as soon as we became aware of the error, and will be updating the defence."

Yulia Navalnaya ***PHOTO: X***

Navalnaya, who generally kept a low profile throughout her late husband's campaigning, created an account on X on Monday.

The mother of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has filed a lawsuit at a court in the Arctic city of Salekhard contesting officials' refusal to release her son's body, Russia's state news agency Tass reported. A closed-door hearing has been scheduled for March 4, the report said, quoting court officials. *—BBC News*

Trump says long VP shortlist includes Ramaswamy & others

WASHINGTON, 21 FEB

Indian-American biotech entrepreneur-turned-politician Vivek Ramaswamy is amongst the names that former president and Republican frontrunner Donald Trump is considering as his running mate for the 2024 presidential polls.

During a Fox News town hall event on Tuesday, the host asked Trump about six possible choices for his vice presidential shortlist when he rattled off the names of South Carolina Senator Tim Scott, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, former Hawaii Representative Tulsi Gabbard, Vivek Ramaswamy, Florida Representative Byron Donalds, and South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem, a report in Politico.com said.

Trump, 77, did not name another Indian-American politician, Nikky Haley, who is still in the race. Incidentally, following his poor showing in Iowa caucuses in mid-January, Ramaswamy, 38, had not just backed out as a Republican presidential candidate but also backed its winner Trump.

Donald Trump ***PHOTO: PTI***

- Indian-American biotech entrepreneur-turned-politician Vivek Ramaswamy is amongst the names that former president Donald Trump is considering as his running mate for the 2024 presidential polls

When the Fox News town hall event host Laura Ingraham asked him, "Are they all on your shortlist?" Trump said, "They are. Honestly, all of those people are good. They're all good, they're all solid." Earlier in August 2023, Ramaswamy had hinted at being Trump's running mate if he did not win the Republican nomination.

Late on Tuesday, the news portal drew attention to how Trump is known to talk off the cuff, and it would be surprising if he were to pick DeSantis. "Trump and DeSantis spent a year savaging each other before DeSantis dropped out of the presidential race following a disappointing second-place finish in the Iowa caucuses. DeSantis, however, has since endorsed Trump. Trump has also stopped attacking the governor and has retired the "DeSanctimonious" nickname he had given him," the report said. *—PTI*

US lawyers to say why Assange should face spying charges

LONDON, 21 FEB

Lawyers for the American government are to tell a London court on Wednesday why they think Julian Assange should face espionage charges in the United States, in response to a last-ditch bid by his defence to stop the extradition of the WikiLeaks founder.

Assange's lawyers are asking the High Court to grant him a new appeal — his last legal roll of the dice in the long-running legal saga that has kept him in a British high-security prison for the past five years.

The 52-year-old Australian has been indicted on 17 charges of espionage and one charge of computer misuse over his website's publication of classified US documents almost 15 years ago.

American prosecutors say Assange helped US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk.

Lawyers for the US have argued in written submissions that said Assange was being prosecuted "because he is alleged to have committed serious criminal offences."

Attorney James Lewis said Assange's actions "threatened damage to the strategic and national security interests of the United States" and put individuals named in the documents — including Iraqis and Afghans who had helped US forces — at risk of "serious physical harm."

- American prosecutors say Assange helped US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk

To his supporters, however, Assange is a secrecy-busting journalist who exposed US military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. They argue that the prosecution is politically motivated and he won't get a fair trial in the US.

Assange's lawyers argued on the first day of the hearing on Tuesday that American authorities are seeking to punish Assange for WikiLeaks' "exposure of criminality on the part of the US government on an unprecedented scale," including torture and killings. *—AP*

DENYING US CLAIMS

No plan of putting nuclear weapons in space: Putin

MOSCOW, 21 FEB

Russian President Vladimir Putin declared on Tuesday that Moscow has no intention of deploying nuclear weapons in space, claiming that the country has only developed space capabilities similar to those of the US.

Putin's statement follows the White House confirmation last week that Russia has obtained a "troubling" anti-satellite weapon capability, although such a weapon is not operational yet. White House national security spokesman John Kirby said it would violate the international Outer Space Treaty, but declined to comment on whether the weapon is nuclear-capable.

The treaty signed by more than 130 countries, including Russia, prohibits the deployment of "nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction" in orbit or the stationing of "weapons in outer space in any other manner." The White House said it would look to engage the Russians directly on the concerns.

"Our position is quite clear and transparent: we have always been and remain categorically opposed to the deployment of nuclear weapons in space," Putin said. "Just the opposite, we are urging everyone to adhere to all the agreements that exist in this sphere."

Speaking during a meeting with his defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, Putin noted that Russia has only developed space capabilities that "other nations, including the US have." "And they know it," he added.

Putin noted that Russia has only developed space capabilities that "other nations, including the US have" ***PHOTO: EPA***

"We haven't deployed any nuclear weapons in space or any elements of them to use against satellites or to create fields where satellites can't work efficiently," Shoigu said. Shoigu alleged that the White House could have made the allegations of a new Russian space capability in order to force Congress to support aid for Ukraine and also encourage Moscow to renter nuclear arms control talks that Russia has suspended amid the tensions with the US over Ukraine.

Putin didn't rule out possible future contacts with the US, but reaffirmed his view that Washington's push for Russia's defeat in Ukraine makes them impossible for now.

"The US and the West, for one thing, are calling for Russia's strategic defeat, while, on the other hand, they would like to have a dialogue on strategic stability, pretending that those things aren't connected," he said. "It won't work." *—AP*

The 52-year-old Julian Asange Australian has been indicted on 17 charges of espionage ***PHOTO: AP***

Gold rises ₹150; silver climbs ₹100

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Gold prices rose Rs 150 to Rs 62,850 per 10g in the national capital on Wednesday amid strong global cues in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 62,700 per 10g. Silver also climbed Rs 100 to Rs 75,700 per kg, while it had settled at Rs 75,600 per kg in the previous close. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 62,850 grams, up by Rs 150, amid a bullish trend in overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,027 per ounce, up by USD 9 from the previous close.—*PTI*

Rupee rises 1 paisa to close at 82.96 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 21 FEB

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and appreciated 1 paisa to close at 82.96 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, as the support from easing crude oil prices was negated by a weak trend in domestic equities. Forex traders said the strength of the American currency in the overseas market and sustained foreign fund outflows weighed on the local unit.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 82.90 against the greenback. It hit an intraday high of 82.86 and a low of 82.97. It finally settled at 82.96 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 1 paisa from its previous close of 82.97. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.06 per cent higher at 104.14.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.27 per cent to USD 82.12 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex declined 434.31 points, or 0.59 per cent to 72,623.09 points while Nifty fell 141.90 points or 0.64 per cent to 22,055.05 points.—*PTI*

ICAI to suggest ways to improve tax to GDP ratio

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

Chartered accountants' apex body ICAI will provide suggestions to the government on increasing the tax to GDP ratio as well as on green finance. At a briefing in the national capital on Wednesday, ICAI President Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal said the tax to GDP ratio should improve for the country to become a developed economy by 2047. The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has more than 400,000 members and 850,000 lakh students.

Spelling out the vision for the institute, Agarwal, who took over as the President on February 12, also said a committee will identify irrelevant laws and make suggestions in this regard to the government.

Among other initiatives, the institute will come out with a roadmap on how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be used for its various stakeholders.—*PTI*

BluSmart signs agreement with Tata Power

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Electric mobility ride hailing service provider BluSmart on Wednesday said it has signed a multi-year power purchase agreement with Tata Power Trading Company Ltd to source green power.

Under the power purchase agreement (PPA), 30 MW capacity will be sourced by Tata Power Trading Company Ltd (TPTCL) from Tata Power's 200 MW solar PV power plant in Bikaner district of Rajasthan, BluSmart said in a statement. "Enabled by the recently enacted green energy open access rules, this partnership with TPTCL allows BluSmart to completely eliminate Scope 2 emissions (indirect emissions) from its existing 1.4 million sq ft of EV charging infrastructure and future charging hubs," it said. —*PTI*

SENSEX SLUMPS OVER 400 POINTS

Nifty settles 434.31 points or 0.59% lower at 72,623 points

MUMBAI, 21 FEB

NTPC was the biggest loser among the Sensex constituents, ending with a loss of 2.71 per cent *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty broke their six-day winning run on Wednesday and settled with a steep fall amid fag-end selling triggered by a rush for profit booking and mixed global cues.

The 30-share benchmark Sensex stayed mostly firm during intra-day but settled 434.31 points or 0.59 per cent lower at 72,623.09 points. It touched the intra-day low of 72,450.56, down 0.83 per cent from previous closing level of 73,057.40 points.

Similarly, the broader Nifty also paired all its intra-day gains before closing 141.90 points or 0.64 per cent down at 22,055.05 points. The 50-share barometer had hit a lifetime peak of 22,196.95 points on Tuesday and remained mostly in the upward trajectory on Wednesday.

In the Sensex pack, 20 stocks ended in the red while 37 of the Nifty constituents closed the session with losses.

NTPC was the biggest loser among the Sensex constituents, ending with a loss of 2.71 per cent. It was followed by PowerGrid, Wipro, HCLTech, L&T and Tech Mahindra.

In contrast, Tata Steel, SBI, JSW Steel and IndusInd Bank closed in the positive territory. Tata Steel gained 1.99 per cent and SBI ended 1.51 per cent higher.Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said the Indian market is facing stiff resistance at higher levels and the valuation of a broader index is at a significant premium, leading to an unfavourable risk reward, which influences investors to book profits."Global markets treaded cautiously awaiting the US Federal Reserve (meeting) minutes while Chinese markets were buoyed by policy interventions."Concerns lingered since investors were heavily betting on a US Fed rate cut, which is put at risk by January's higher-than-expected inflation." he noted.

- **In contrast, Tata Steel, SBI, JSW Steel and IndusInd Bank closed in the positive territory. Tata Steel gained 1.99 per cent and SBI ended 1.51 per cent higher**

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.68 per cent to USD 81.78 per barrel.Asian stocks witnessed mixed trends while European markets were trading largely in the negative zone. The US stocks ended Tuesday's session with losses.

On Tuesday, Sensex continued its upward movement for the sixth straight session and jumped 349.24 points to close at 73,057.40 points while Nifty went up 74.70 points to end the day at 22,196.95 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers on Tuesday as they offloaded securities worth Rs 1,335.51 crore, according to exchange data. —*PTI*

HIT LOWER CIRCUIT LIMIT

Zee Entertainment shares tumble 12%

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

During SEBI'S probe it discovered that about Rs 2,000 crore may have been diverted from the company *PHOTO: PTI*

Shares of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) tumbled 12 per cent in the mid-session trade on Wednesday amid reports of capital market regulator Sebi has unearthed a financial discrepancy exceeding nearly Rs 2,000 crore in the accounts of the company.

The stock of the company nosedived 11.58 per cent to Rs 170.65 apiece on the BSE.

ZEEL shares plunged 11.39 per cent to Rs 170.70 per piece on the NSE.

In the mid-session trade, the scrip also hit its lower circuit limit on the bourses.The 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark rose 90.17 points or 0.12 per cent to 73,147.57, while Nifty of the NSE rose 40.25 points to 22,237.20.

As per the reports, during SEBI'S probe into Zee's founders, the regulator discovered that approximately Rs 2,000 crore may have been diverted from the company.

However, the company spokesperson clarified that the reports related to accounting issues are "incorrect and false".

The report suggested that the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has been in conversation with senior officials at Zee, including its founders Subhash Chandra and his son Punit Goenka, and some board members to explain their stance. Further, the report noted the amount found missing is not final and may change after Sebi reviews the responses from the company executives.

Later, a ZEEL spokesperson said, "The reports and rumours pertaining to accounting issues in the company are incorrect and false. Pursuant to the Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) order, which granted relief to the current Key Managerial Personnel (KMP), the company has been in the process of providing all the comments, information or explanation requested by SEBI, and has extended complete co-operation on all aspects."

On Tuesday, shares of ZEEL settled 8 per cent higher amid reports that Zee and Sony Pictures Networks (India) are working to salvage their USD 10 billion merger.

ZEEL shares have seen a massive downfall after the collapse of its merger with Sony Group Corp's India unit. —*PTI*

Paytm shares hit upper circuit for 4th day

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

Shares of One97 Communications which owns Paytm brand hit the upper circuit for the fourth consecutive session on Wednesday.

The stock of the fintech major climbed 5 per cent each to Rs 395.25 and Rs 395.05 per piece -- its upper circuit limit -- on the BSE and NSE, respectively.

In the morning session, the 30-share BSE Sensex gained 27.95 points or 0.04 per cent to 73,085.35, while Nifty of the NSE slipped 15.75 points to 22,181.20. Paytm scrip has rebounded since Friday and gained more than 21 per cent from Thursday's closing level of Rs 325.The rally in shares of One97 Communication came amid reports that the Directorate of Enforcement (ED), which has been probing crisis-hit fintech company's arm Paytm Payments Bank Ltd, has not found any breaches of the foreign exchange rules so far.

However, the central agency has found certain lapses in Know-Your-Customer (KYC) norms as well as issues around generation of suspicious transaction report.

Last week, ED had initiated a probe into overseas transactions by PPBL for allegedly flouting foreign exchange rules.Shares of One97 Communications surged 5 per cent on Tuesday, a day after hitting the upper circuit limit on Monday.

On Friday, shares of Paytm rebounded after three consecutive days of fall amid the company coming under the regulatory scanner for various violations related to its payments bank business.

One97 Communication stock has taken a beating on the exchanges this month after the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) action against the company's arm PPBL.As per the 31 January order, RBI asked PPBL to stop further deposits, credit transactions, or top-ups in any customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, and National Common Mobility —*PTI*

UK, Canada CAs to practice in India

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Chartered accountants from the UK and Canada might be allowed to practice in India on a reciprocal basis, with the apex body ICAI making the proposal to the government.

ICAI President Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal on Wednesday said the proposal will be implemented strictly on the reciprocal basis that chartered accountants from India will also be allowed to practice in the United Kingdom and Canada.It will be the first time that an overseas chartered accountant will be allowed to practice in India.

The proposal is part of India's ongoing negotiations for Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with the UK and Canada.

Agarwal also said that a similar arrangement is being looked with Australia.Once the reciprocal system is implemented, the chartered accountants from the foreign countries will have to be registered with the ICAI, which will be regulating them.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has more than 4 lakh members and 8.5 lakh students.

Currently, around 42,000 chartered accountants from India are working overseas.

"There is a huge demand for chartered accountants from India," Agarwal, who took over as the President earlier this month, said. —*PTI*

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos completes $8.5 B share sale plan

WASHINGTON, 21 FEB

Bezos, who is the firm's founder and executive chair, had last sold Amazon shares in 2021 *PHOTO: PTI*

Multi-billionaire Jeff Bezos has sold another 14 million Amazon shares, worth around $2.4 billion.

The latest sale brings the total number of shares he has sold in the firm over the last nine trading days to about 50 million, with a value of around $8.5 billion.

The tech giant had previously said Bezos would sell up to 50 million shares by the end of January 2025.

His sales of Amazon stock comes after they have risen by more than 76 per cent in the past year.

Bezos, who is the firm's founder and executive chair, had previously last sold Amazon shares in 2021.

He has also given away shares in Amazon as part of his philanthropy, most recently in 2022.

As Bezos moved to Miami in Florida from Seattle in Washington last year, he will save almost $600m in tax on the $8.5bn worth of stock he has sold.

Gains above $2,50,000 from the sale of shares or other long term investments, are taxed at 7 per cent in Washington state. Florida does not have state taxes on incomes or capital gains.

However, he will still be liable to federal taxes as a result of selling the shares.

When Bezos announced his move to Florida it prompted speculation over whether it was because of a potential tax bill he would have faced in Washington after the state approved a new tax on large stock sales.

Bezos remains Amazon's biggest shareholder and is one of the richest people in the world, with an estimated fortune of more than $190bn. —*BBC News*

India must focus on exports for economic growth

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

India must focus on exports to achieve a 10 per cent growth rate for the economy, said Arvind Panagariya, chairman of the Sixteenth Finance Commission.

"I've looked at successful countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, China, and India – these are the six high-growth examples. My conclusion is very clear – countries that have been open are the ones that have grown rapidly," Panagariya said.

The former vice chairman of Niti Aayog further highlighted that the country needed to follow China's strategy to increase its per-capita income and wean away from idea of import substitution.

"Even if we can capture the global market for a few products, that's it! We don't have to do anything else. That really is the China story – it acquired a very large share in certain products. And that gave China such a huge boost; for 3-4 decades, it grew at 10 per cent a year," he pointed out, noting that the global export market, at $32 trillion in 2022, was almost 10 times India's GDP.

India's GDP is expected to grow 7.3 per cent in FY24, as per first advance estimate released in January.

Panagariya cited the South Korea example, where growth dipped 2-3 percentage points once the country succumbed to the temptation of import substitution. —*PTI*

'Salaries in India to increase 9.5%'

MUMBAI, 21 FEB

Salaries in India are expected to increase by 9.5 per cent in 2024, slightly lower than the actual increase of 9.7 per cent in 2023, largely in response to market dynamics, according to global professional services firm Aon plc.

According to the firm's annual salary increase and turnover survey 2023-24 India, that analysed data across 1,414 companies from almost 45 industries, salary increase in India seems to have stabilised at high single digits, after the post-pandemic high increments in 2022.

India continues to roll out the highest salary increases amongst the major economies amidst geopolitical tensions, followed by Bangladesh, and Indonesia with 7.3 per cent and 6.5 per cent average salary increases in 2024. It revealed the overall attrition rates fell from 21.4 per cent in 2022 to 18.7 per cent in 2023.

This highlights a job market that remains competitive and that turnover rates may have reached their peak. A decrease in attrition is favourable for organisations allowing them to direct resources towards improving capability and enhancing productivity, thereby creating a positive cycle, the survey said.

It said that the world today continues to grapple with short-term risks like economic uncertainty and conflicts that threaten to escalate. Moreover, the global workforce is at the cusp of possibly the greatest disruption in the form of the impact of AI/ML. Talent professionals will need to curate people strategies that will help build resilience. They need to respond to changing business dynamics and revamp talent supply to match changing demand patterns, the survey said. —*PTI*

Payments solution launched for construction sector

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Bettamint, a workforce management solutions provider, on Wednesday said it has launched payments solution 'Bettapay' to better manage financial transactions in the construction sector.

Bettapay can synchronize payments with specific project parameters such as debit notes, worker attendance for wage payments, and even rewards and incentives for completing time-sensitive tasks, Bettamint said in a statement.

The payment solution would help developers and contractors to significantly reduce the administrative burden associated with authenticating, billing and recording field payments, the company said.

The launch of Bettapay aligns with the government's recent directive urging employers to ensure that all wage payments to workers are made digitally, it said —*PTI*

Liquidity deficit tightening economy

KOLKATA, 21 FEB

Financial conditions have tightened the economy with liquidity going into a deeper deficit putting upward pressure on short-term rates, according to a research report by CRISIL Market Intelligence and Analytics.

The report released during the month also said that foreign portfolio investors turned net sellers further aggravating the tight liquidity conditions.

- **Foreign portfolio investors turned net sellers further aggravating the tight liquidity conditions**

With tightening of the liquidity, the transmission of interest rates improved across lending and deposit rates in January. However, the cumulative rise in most deposit and lending rates remained lower than the 250 basis points of repo rate increase by the RBI since May 2022, the report said.This incomplete transmission of monetary policy prompted the Reserve Bank of India to keep the interest rates unchanged, the research body said in the report."We believe that the central bank will be active in liquidity management and adopt regulatory measures to prevent excesses in credit growth. We foresee the RBI cutting rates from June 2024," it said.The deficit in domestic systemic liquidity almost doubled in January compared with December. —*PTI*

WORK HASSLE

Employers prioritise quality work over time-punching: Survey

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

A significant percentage of recruiters believe cultivating a positive work environment and rewards and recognition are essential to boost employees' productivity as against traditional time-based metrics, according to a survey.

In contrast to the traditional approaches of evaluating employees based on time and attendance tracking, 7 out of 10 employers prioritise quality work and key performance indicators like targets and project completion rate as the primary indicator of productivity.The survey by jobs and professional networking platform apna.co said that the move towards quality work and target completion as against traditional time-based metrics marks a major shift in productivity assessment approaches.

As per the survey, 77 per cent of recruiters believe cultivating a positive work environment and rewards and recognition are essential to boost employees' productivity.Moreover, 5 out of 10 recruiters preferred training and development and regular feedback to minimise distractions and enhance focus during work hours.It involved over 5,000 employers to delve into the evolving dynamics of productivity assessment in the workplace.

"In today's fast-paced work environment, effective workplace communication and a positive work environment are paramount for fostering productivity.

"Our survey also observed a fundamental change in the perspective of employers who are addressing productivity killers and embracing strategies to foster a positive and efficient work culture by focusing on high-quality work instead of mere time-punching, encouraging breaks and leaves," Nirmit Parikh, Founder & CEO of apna.co said.It noted that poor communication and an unhealthy work environment affect productivity in an organisation.

To address these concerns, companies should adopt actions like setting clear expectations, managing workloads efficiently, investing in training, and providing regular feedback. —*PTI*

As per the survey, 77 per cent of recruiters believe cultivating a positive work environment *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

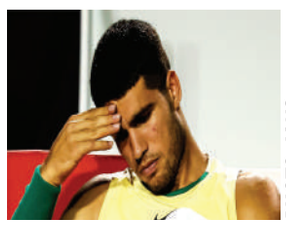


PHOTO: IANS

Alcaraz retires hurt from Rio Open

RIO DE JANEIRO, 21 FEB

Two-time major winner Carlos Alcaraz retired hurt from the Rio Open on Tuesday after two games due to a right ankle injury. The retirement at 1-1 meant Brazil's Thiago Monteiro advanced to the second round. He will face his compatriot Felipe Meligeni Alves for a place in the quarterfinals.Alcaraz twisted his ankle in the first game after only two points. He received medical attention and broke Monteiro's serve, but after the Brazilian pulled level he shook his rival's hand and left the court walking as his coach Juan Carlos Ferrero looked concerned. The Spanish player said his doctors said the injury was not serious."These things happen, even more so on clay," Alcaraz said, "It was not a problem of the court, I got injured as I switched direction. That happens in this kind of surface."—*AP*

PHOTO: PTI

It looks 'platey': Ollie Pope on Ranchi pitch

RANCHI, 21 FEB

England vice-captain Ollie Pope on Wednesday provided insights into the Ranchi pitch, where the fourth Test is set to commence on 23 February. According to Pope, the pitch already displays numerous cracks and appears "platey," indicating it's not the typical batting-friendly surface. England would not mind a rank turner in the fourth Test because assistance to spinners from the word go will make it a level-playing field, vice-captain Ollie Pope said on Wednesday. —*PTI*

PHOTO: IANS

Sumit Nagal drops out of Top 100

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

India's top singles player Sumit Nagal dropped out of the top 100 after losing 16 points from his kitty, resulting in him sliding three spots to 101 in the latest ATP rankings.Last year in the same week, Nagal earned 41 ranking points by reaching the semifinals of the Chennai Challenger as a qualifier. He was defending those points and could earn only 25 in Bengaluru last week.—PTI

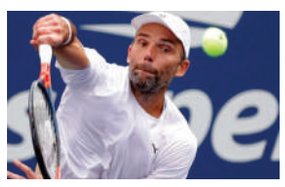


PHOTO: IANS

Ivo Karlovic officially announces his retirement

BUSAN, 21 FEB

Ivo Karlovic has officially announced his retirement from tennis after having not played a tournament match in two and a half years.The 2.11-meter (6 foot, 11-inch) Croatian said in a post-Wednesday on X, formerly Twitter, that "I've had a very gratifying, unorthodox, and long career coming from extremely humble beginnings, especially for a tennis player."The 44-year-old Karlovic — he will turn 45 next week — played his last ATP match in a second-round qualifying loss at Indian Wells, California in October 2021.—*AP*

Haaland 'shuts mouths' as Man City close on Liverpool

It looked like City would be dropping points in a tight title race

MANCHESTER, 21 FEB

Pep Guardiola said Erling Haaland had "shut the mouths" of his critics after scoring the only goal of a nervy 1-0 win for Manchester City over Brentford on Tuesday. Just two points separate the top three in a fascinating Premier League title race as City moved to within a point of leaders Liverpool, with third-placed Arsenal one point further back with 13 games to go.

Haaland was keen to make amends for a frustrating night in front of goal as City were held 1-1 at home by Chelsea on Saturday.

Erling Haaland added Brentford to his list of Premier League conquests when he came to Manchester City's rescue with a 71st-minute goal to clinch a 1-0 win Tuesday.

It looked like City would be dropping points in a tight title race for the second time in four days after a 1-1 draw with Chelsea only for Haaland to finally get some space behind Brentford's defense in a counterattack. Julian Alvarez played the ball forward, Haaland collected it and raced past center-back Kristoffer Ajer, who lost his footing. One-on-one with Mark Flekken, Haaland took his shot early and placed a low finish to the Dutch goalkeeper's right for his league-leading 17th goal of the campaign.Of the 21 teams Haaland has faced since arriving in the Premier League last season, Brentford was the only one he'd failed to score against.

Not anymore.

"He's the best in the world," said Oscar Bobb, Haaland's City and Norway teammate who made his first Premier League start on Tuesday.

The narrow and nervy win moved the defending champions into second place in the standings, one point above Arsenal and one behind Liverpool. All three title contenders have played 25 of 38 games.

Liverpool hosts Luton on Wednesday.

City extended its unbeaten run in all competitions from 6 to 16 Dec. matches, winning 14 and drawing two of them. Pep Guardiola's team is also into the last 16 in the FA Cup and is well-placed to get into the Champions League quarterfinals after taking a 3-1 lead over FC Copenhagen following the first leg of the round of 16. —*AP*

City star Haaland scored the winner in the victory over Brentford **PHOTO: IANS**

Jaiswal breaks into top-20 of ICC Test Rankings

DUBAI, 21 FEB

Yashasvi Jaiswal **PHOTO:PTI**

Young India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal on Wednesday broke into the top-20 of the ICC Test Rankings, rising 14 spots to 15th in the batting charts after scoring back-to-back double centuries in the ongoing series against England.

The 22-year-old left-hander joined a select band of seven cricketers to score double centuries in two consecutive Tests including two Indians -- Vinod Kambli and Virat Kohli.

Jaiswal scored 209 in India's first innings in the second Test at Visakhapatnam and then hit an unbeaten 214 runs in the second essay at Rajkot to contribute to the home team's massive 434-run victory over England that took them 2-1 up in the series.

Ravindra Jadeja, who was the player-of-the-match in Rajkot, also climbed up in the batting rankings from 41st to 34th position after his knock of 112 in the first innings, the ICC said in a statement.

He also returned with a seven-wicket match haul that lifted him three places to sixth in the bowling rankings. Veteran off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who entered the elite 500 Test wicket club at Rajkot, climbed a rung to the second position behind pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah.

Jadeja and Ashwin continued to hold on to the first two spots in the Test all-rounders rankings. Jadeja consolidated his position among the all-rounders, going from 416 to a career-best 469 rating points. —*PTI*

FAST BOWLERS HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE IN THE SERIES AGAINST ENGLAND: GILL

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

A pitches might not have been entirely in their favour, but the Indian pacers' ability to strike at vital situations has made a sea of difference in the Test series against England, reckons top-order batter Shubman Gill.The four spinners – R Ashwin (11), Ravindra Jadeja (12), Kuldeep Yadav (8) and Axar Patel (5) – together have taken 36 wickets across three matches as compared to 22 by pacers so far.So, the numbers might be favouring the tweakers, but Gill said the pacemen bowled well according to the conditions to keep their side ahead."Wherever we play in India, wickets help spinners a bit. Ash bhai and Jaddu bhai will take wickets anyway, but the way our fast bowlers have bowled, it has made the difference in this series," said Gill during a media interaction ahead of the fourth Test, starting Friday.However, India will be without Jasprit Bumrah for the Ranchi Test as the premier pacer has been given rest as part of the workload management.He has so far taken 17 wickets from three Tests to lead the chart for India.But Gill said the other Indian pacers have enough experience in these conditions to make an impact, citing the example of Mohammed Siraj's four-wicket haul at Rajkot."Like I talked about Virat bhai if a player in the class of Boom bhai is not playing, any team will miss him, especially since he leads our fast-bowling attack. But if you look at it, Siraj took four wickets in crucial times in the last match."So, I think, all the pacers have enough experience in Indian conditions, especially bowling reverse swing," said Gill.Gill said the absence of experienced players like Virat Kohli and Bumrah has been viewed as a perfect chance by a clutch of young players to prove their mettle on the biggest stage.Gill offered Sarfaraz Khan, who made twin fifties in his debut Test at Rajkot, as an example."Virat bhai is not with us for the last three Tests. —*PTI*

Indian men and women lose in pre-quarterfinals

WTT TEAM C'SHIPS

BUSAN, 21 FEB

The Indian men's and women's teams came up short in the pre-quarterfinals of the World Table Tennis Championships here on Wednesday but their performance, in all likelihood, will be enough to send them to the Paris Olympics.

The Manika Batra-led women's team lost 1-3 to Chinese Taipei in the round of 16 while the men were blown away by South Korea for the second time in the competition, losing 0-3.

The event offered Olympic quotas to the quarterfinalists but the men and women from India are likely to cut through their world rankings.The final announcement will be made on 5 March after including the points from the World Championships.The women's team is currently ranked 17th and the men's 15th.

Manika Batra **PHOTO: PTI**

"In all likelihood, the men and women have qualified for the Olympics but we will have to wait till March for the official announcement," said a Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) official.

In the women's pre-quarterfinal, Manika put India ahead with a tense 11-8, 8-11, 4-11, 11-9, 11-9 win over Taipei's Chen Szu-Yu. Sreeja Akula was blanked by world number 10 Cheng I-Ching 11-6, 11-9, 11-5 in the second singles before Ayhika Mukherjee failed to match the power of Li Yu-Jhun, losing 10-12, 13-15, 11-9, 2-11.

In her second singles, the 36th ranked Manika tried her best against Cheng, an opponent she stunned last year, but on this occasion, the world number 10 came well prepared to take on the Indian who uses the long pimpled rubber on the backhand. —*AP*

India lose 2-4 to Netherlands

ROURKELA, 21 FEB

India lost 2-4 against the Netherlands in a shootout after their return leg FIH Pro League match ended in a 1-1 draw here on Wednesday.

In their first leg match in Bhubaneswar, India defeated the Netherlands 4-2 in a shootout after a 2-2 stalemate in regulation time.

World no.1 Netherlands broke the deadlock through Floris Middendorp (4th minute) before vice-captain Hardik Singh (38th) equalized for India, who is ranked fourth.

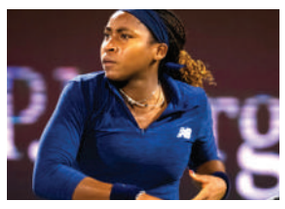
In the shootout, Araijeet Singh Hundal and Lalit Kumar Upadhyay scored for India, while Sukhjeet Singh and Shamsher Singh missed from the one-on-one situation.

The win gave the Netherlands two points, while India pocketed one point.

India applied early pressure on the Dutch with some threatening circle penetrations but failed to yield any positive results.

The Netherlands, in turn, took the lead from their first circle entry in the fourth minute through Middendorp, who scored his first international career goal. —*PTI*

Netherlands players celebrate on Wednesday **PHOTO: @FIH_HOCKEY**



Coco Gauff **PHOTO: IANS**

Gauff overcomes red-hot Karolina

DUBAI, 21 FEB

Coco Gauff faced more than her fair share of adversity in Wednesday's third round of the Dubai Duty-Free Tennis Championships.

She served eight double faults and was broken three times in losing a 6-2 first set against a red-hot Karolina Pliskova, winner of her last 11 matches (not including the walkover she gave to Iga Swiatek in the semifinals last week in Doha due to a back injury.)

Serving up 4-2 in the second set, at deuce, Gauff found herself entwined in a prolonged disagreement with French umpire Pierre Bacchi after her successful Hawk-Eye challenge proved her first serve did, indeed, land in. Bacchi gave Pliskova the benefit of the doubt (her return on the stretch had found the bottom of the net). —*AP*

Manisha's brace seals India's 4-3 victory

ALANYA, 21 FEB

The Indian football team withstood a late charge by Estonia to pick up a hard-fought 4-3 win in the Turkish Women's Cup on Wednesday, the side's first victory against a European nation.

Striker Manisha Kalyan scored a brace and the Chaoba Devi-coached side created a piece of history as the Indian senior women's team had never before triumphed over a team from the UEFA Confederation in an official outing. The teams were locked 1-1 at halftime.

Manisha struck in the 17th and 81st minutes while Indumathi Kathiresan (62'), and Pyari Xaxa (79') scored the other goals for India.

Lisette Tammik (32'), Vlada Kubassova (88') and Mari Liis Lillemae (90') found the target for Estonia. Played at the picturesque Gold City Sports Complex, the Blue Tigresses made a perfect start when they shot into the lead through a Manisha goal. After Estonia drew level off a strike by Lisette Tammik, a rampaging India struck thrice through Indumathi. —*PTI*

Indian striker Manisha Kalyan scored a brace in the match against Estonia to win the game by 4-3 in the Turkish Women's Cup on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Australia's Mitchell Marsh celebrates with teammate Tim David after winning the T20 cricket international between Australia and New Zealand in Wellington **PHOTO: PTI**

Australia's thrilling last-ball win vs NZ

WELLINGTON, 21 FEB

Australia captain Mitchell Marsh produced a powerful all-round performance before Tim David batted superbly at the death to complete a last-ball win over New Zealand in a high-scoring series opener in Wellington.

Chasing 216 after Devon Conway emerged from a form slump with a half-century, Australia appeared on the brink of defeat despite Marsh's effort. But David took over with 31 off 10 balls punctuated by a boundary through the leg-side off Tim Southee to seal Australia's remarkable heist. Australia drew first blood in the fight for the Chappell-Hadlee Trophy, which had previously only been awarded to the winner of a bilateral ODI series between the teams. With the T20 World Cup just over three months away, the three-match series is vital preparation for both teams.

Australia 216 for 4 (Marsh 72*, Warner 32, David 31*, Santner 2-42) beat New Zealand 215 for 3 (Ravindra 68, Conway 63, Marsh 1-21) by six wickets. —*AP*

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

De Jong's penalty earns PSV Eindhoven a 1-1 draw

LONDON, 21 FEB

Luuk de Jong converted a penalty to cancel out a goal by his former teammate Donyell Malen as PSV Eindhoven and Borussia Dortmund drew 1-1 on Tuesday in the first leg of their Champions League round of 16 matchup.

Malen scored against his old club in the 24th minute with a shot that appeared to deflect off the outstretched leg of defender Sergiño Dest.

Malen didn't wildly celebrate his first Champions League goal since December 2021, instead holding both hands in the air almost apologetically.

The goal was a familiar sight for the PSV fans. Malen scored 50 times in 81 appearances for the Eindhoven club from 2018-21. The crowd at PSV Stadium gave Malen a warm ovation when he was substituted late in the match.

De Jong equalized when he calmly slotted a low penalty past Alexander Meyer in the 56th minute after Mats Hummels had brought down Malik Tillman. It took De Jong's Champions League goal tally to a PSV record nine, one more than Ruud van Nistelrooy.

Dortmund players complained bitterly that Hummels had played the ball, but referee Srdjan Jovanovic waved away their protests.

Luuk de Jong converted a penalty to cancel out a goal by his former teammate Donyell Malen **PHOTO: TWITTER**

- Luuk de Jong converted a penalty to cancel out a goal by his former teammate Donyell Malen as PSV Eindhoven and Borussia Dortmund drew 1-1 on Tuesday in the first leg of their Champions League round of 16 matchup.

"The referee judged that there was a penalty," said Dortmund coach Edin Terzic. "Our wish remains that he should look at the screen. He was very sure of his decision. We think it was a hard decision."

Hummels himself was less diplomatic.

"Zero percent a penalty. Zero. I slide in, I clearly play the ball, change its path, and only then make minimal contact," the defender told Amazon Prime. "Tillman was laughing himself silly on the pitch, (Johan) Bakayoko was laughing himself silly, they were all grinning at me for minutes."

Dest came close to snatching a late winner when he passed Julian Ryerson on the left but Meyer, a late replacement for the injured Gregor Kobel, saved his shot.

"In the second half we had it completely under control," PSV midfielder Joey Veerman said. "In the first half, we had the better chances. If you look at the match as a whole we had better chances than Dortmund."

The second leg is in Dortmund on March 13.

"If we can win our home game, we'll get through and that's the task for now," Terzic said.

De Jong also said he was confident heading to Dortmund.

"We played well today and we can do that there, too," De Jong said.

PSV, led by former Dortmund coach Peter Bosz, finished second behind Arsenal in Group B to reach its first Champions League round-of-16 match in eight seasons. —*AP*